PRAYER FOR ALL TIMES

By
PIERRE CHARLES
S. J.

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Translated by Maud Monahan

from

LA PRIÈRE DE TOUTES LES HEURES

by

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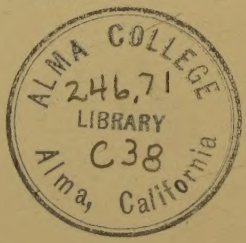

FIRST SERIES

FOURTH IMPRESSION

P. J. KENEDY & SONS
12 BARCLAY STREET
NEW YORK

45654

Nihil Obstat.

EDUARDUS MAHONEY, S.T.D.

EDM. CANON SURMONT
Vic. Gen.

Westmonasterii,

Die, 18 Maii, 1925.

Printed in Gt. Britain.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Very special thanks are due to the Most Reverend Alban Goodier, S.J., Archbishop of Bombay, and to the Reverend Charles Blount, S.J., for the great kindness with which they undertook the labour of reading and correcting the translation in all stages of MS. and proof, and of verifying the numerous quotations.

PROLOGUE

Gloria Tibi Domine
Liturgy. The Mass

IF the place of our prayer is but alongside of our life, even if it is close at hand, it is as though we put the yeast beside the dough, or fumbled with the key on the edge of the keyhole. The life of a Christian should be a life of prayer. Why? Because however trivial it may be in appearance and however wanting in external brilliancy, it can become divine.

By the mere fact that the conventional observances which so often surround prayer have been chosen and arranged beforehand, a cold shadow is at times cast over our devotion, and it is enveloped in a vague feeling of insincerity. For not having dared, in their dealings with God, to be such as He Himself has made them, many people have debarred themselves from all experience of the life of prayer; a life which is fed and upheld by light-giving sincerity. The scrupulous anxiety to be punctiliously correct has overthrown, within many souls, the happiness of being true. They have never joyously dared to put their trust in the real, and in God who is its Master; their one fear has been lest they should fail in carrying out the prescriptions of some meticulous and unattractive formulary.

Now, however, the custom of daily Communion, bringing us as it does to the God of every day, is gradually dispelling these awe-inspiring prejudices from our minds. The God of each of our days interests Himself in the events of each day; in that very prosaic crowd of little occupations and of little worries; He moves among them, as formerly He moved among the dust-stained children of Nazareth, the unknown crowds of Galilee, and the thousands of very ordinary poor country folk among whom He sowed the good tidings of His beatitudes.

Why should not our prayer be spent in sanctifying this life which God has given us, and which we should love divinely, by associating ourselves more and more consciously and more and more peacefully with the silent work of Grace.

People say at times: When I kneel down before God, I banish everything else . . . and when I speak to Him, I at once suppress three-quarters of my every-day vocabulary; I search out the rarest words and I avoid mentioning common things; I pretend to be quite other than I am, I should never dare to tell God that the North wind makes my head ache, nor that my feet, the feet of a weary pilgrim, burn painfully in my badly made shoes.

Why should we have this pagan shyness and reserve with God! Must we pretend and make-believe in the presence of substantial Truth? At the marriage feast of Cana did He not Himself repair a want of foresight which was not in the least of a dramatic order? With what simplicity did He not advise Jairus to give food to the little child whom He had just raised to life! Did He not

complain that when Simon the Pharisee invited Him to his house, He was not welcomed with the customary salutation, nor given water for His feet, nor perfume for His hair?

If then in this "Prayer for all Times" simple words are used and lowly things are mentioned, let not this scandalize anyone, as though it were a want of respect, nor should these humble things be driven out of the divine presence, as if they were intruders. These daily, lowly realities are at home in the house of the Father, where, in fact, the only misplaced and ridiculous things are our pride, our stiff courtier-like manners, our classic nicety in the use of words and our off-hand disdain. The God of heaven and of earth, the Word, Creator of all that is, Sustainer of all in virtue of His power, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have never rejected anything that they have made: *nihil eorum odisti quæ fecisti.* (*Wisdom* xi. 25.) To accept the actualities of life with simplicity is the first of duties and the final one. Little children learning their A B C begin their lesson by the Sign of the Cross, and it is In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost that they chant in monotonous chorus for an hour, twice two are four. And it is in the Name of the Blessed Trinity that, in Catholic countries, the farmer's wife cuts the great loaf on which she has first marked a cross with the blade of her knife. It is likewise in the same Blessed Name and after having signed himself with the sacred sign that a Catholic drinks a glass of water or eats a bit of bread. If it offends our ears to hear that we who are but as little ants of a

day, have God for our partner in our smallest actions, it is a certain proof that we have not understood yet what we are, nor realized the meaning of our life.

It has not seemed advisable to put this "Prayer for all Times" into a methodically reasoned form, nor to divide it into preludes, points, affections and colloquies; nor do the various chapters follow each other in any clearly marked order. The hours in the lives of men follow no rigid law, and virtues do not become necessary to us successively, one after another, following the learned hierarchical order of the *Secunda Secundæ*. The reader will, however, realize that the play of thought in these papers is not haphazard, nor are the ideas running riot in uncontrolled anarchy. The end aimed at (which it was perhaps hardly possible to attain) was to make smooth the ways of the Spirit, of that Spirit which ever breathes how and where He will, and Whom none can bind down to follow rigid methods. To show God as near to us—*Dominus enim prope est*—(*Philippians* iv. 5) is to continue the work of the Apostles, and to unfold the eternal message.

The texts of Scripture have been used in these pages *only as a help to devotion*. "The Scriptures must be understood through the Spirit that inspired them, that is to say through the Holy Spirit," wrote Cardinal Bellarmine in a very neatly turned phrase: *Omnis scriptura eo Spiritu debet intelligi quo scripta est, id est Spiritu Sancto*. It is unquestionably allowable to glean invitations to thought and encouragements to pray from the Sacred pages and from the leaves of the Missal.

The Fathers of the first centuries did so. And in her introits and antiphons the Catholic Church sets before us allusions to the Sacred Text and adaptations of its meaning. Children have the right to use their mother's language. They have the right to believe that God has hidden lights and lessons for them beneath the inspired words, and where no infallible decision intervenes, they are free to gather from Holy Writ that peace-bringing consolation which the author of the *Imitation* with many others before him, urges them to seek there, and which the Holy Spirit, the Father of the Poor, has prepared for them in secret.

PIERRE CHARLES, S.J.

Louvain, Pentecost 1922.

I

Ubi caput reclinet
Where to lay His Head
(*Matt. viii*, 20.)

OUR LORD GOD seeks a place to rest in the shelter of a strong and watchful love. He would sleep in peace, as in the ship with His disciples, far off from the clamorous crowd and the uproar of the tumultuous world. He seeks, that is to say, for a soul that will receive Him, and be content to watch in silence by Him; a soul that will find all its happiness in possessing Him, even when no words are uttered, and He remains motionless and as it were overcome with sleep; a friendly and self-sacrificing soul, that will be to Him as the homeliest home: *ubi caput reclinet*, in which He can find rest in His weariness.

He seeks, but hardly does he find such a one, for the greater number of men are too much taken up with themselves to find their happiness in that rest which God enjoys within them. We want someone who will talk to us. All long waiting wearies us, and silence seems full of emptiness. We cannot understand a God who is mute. Faith fails us, and we cannot believe that He is present, acting and Divine, Who seems to sleep and do nothing.

Ubi caput reclinet: He seeks a soul matured and strong in virtue, without roughness and harshness,

one that will yield without difficulty to His Will, and which will not draw back as into a stronghold to escape from the pursuit of grace. *Super cervical dormiens* (*Mark* iv. 38): a gentle and submissive soul—yielding as the rower's cushion in the ship of the Apostles, a soul that knows how to forget itself, to hold itself cheap, to be flexible in His hands and wholly self-surrendered.

But we are full of self; hard, rough, wounding and domineering, without courtesy or gentleness. Never do we let Him lean on us or rest within us. That He may do so, all plunging and jolting should be avoided, whereas good as well as evil troubles and disturbs us. The good desires in the soul are all entangled with human eagerness, and even when we wish to obey, the thoughtless impetuosity of our start carries us generally far beyond the goal. We delight in making schemes, in drawing up the most wonderful programme of sanctity. We set up before ourselves entrancing ideals of virtue, which must be attained, but we rarely stop to purify these desires by passing them through the filter of God's will, nor do we wait to consult Him and correct our views by comparing them with His: *non omnis affectio pue videtur bona statim est sequenda.* (*Imit. Bk.* iii. ii.)

And so it comes to pass that after a time nothing is left of all these magnificent programmes, of these resolutions, so admirable in theory, but a sense of disappointment, a bruised and wounded feeling, a harmful irritation with ourselves, and a paralyzing discouragement, which is wholly unchristian. *Ubi caput reclinet.* Could He possibly be safely and tenderly harboured in such a soul? Could He rest

His divine head on such a heart, full of earthly and conflicting interests? To assure His rest, our inner peace should be unbroken, but to preserve that interior peace not even a good desire may be followed unless His spirit has counselled it. Schemes for the acquisition of virtue, plans for reform of life are doubtless good, but if they are to be anything more than day-dreams and pastimes, they must be rooted in complete interior freedom of soul, and in an entire and courteous acceptance of all the arrangements of God's Providence in our regard. Mould me, O my God, in the form which You have chosen for me. I wish for nothing unless You also will it, I shall always be content to be such as You have desired to have me.

Ubi caput reclinet. I cannot leave Him outside in the storm and dust of the road and in the falling dews of night. I cannot let Him rest that Divine and suffering Head on the stones by the wayside, that Head whose "locks were full of the drops of the night" before they were saturated with the sweat of Blood. *Caput meum plenum est rore.* (*Canticle* v. 2.) My soul must be to Him a hiding place, a house of repose, in which as in a sanctuary we walk with measured tread; and where we speak with lowered voice, as watching by those who sleep.

This overpowering and yet loving reverence for the God at rest within our heart will be both the reason of our restraint and the best means of acquiring it. *Mansionem apud eum faciemus.* (*John* xiv. 23.) This restraint becomes then an act of faith, and it is the Spirit of Christ which must put it in our souls. It is a restraint made up of silence

and of waiting, for we do not watch by Him as by one that is dead, but as by one who is risen gloriously from the dead. We watch by Him with hearts all illuminated by desire, for we know that He has conquered darkness, and that His dawn has a midday radiance. When His hour is come, the hour of His own choice, He will awake from His apparent inaction, and all eyes shall behold Him . . . *et qui eum pupugerunt* (*Apoc.* i. 7) . . . even those who have afflicted Him. This tranquillity which is blended of silence, of waiting, and of love which adores and thanks, is in itself a perfect homage and as a breath of incense. It is difficult for us to attain to it, for our souls are full of strange and clamorous troubles, of secret and exacting ties, of rough and commonplace emotions. All our scattered love should be united and fused into one clear flame. But the inner anarchy has dispersed all our powers, and reposeful, quiet sleep is impossible for Him in the midst of our confusion and disturbance.

And yet, my God, I am not unmoved by Your appeal, nor passive and cold in presence of Your need. I long to make my own, the eternal blessing promised to those who, seeing You wandering without shelter, have opened their doors wide and welcomed You within. *Hospes eram et collegistis Me.* (*Matt.* xxv. 35.) In receiving You, we find ourselves again; the calm and stillness we secure for You become our own, given back to us as a reward. When You can rest within our hearts in peace, our poor heads are likewise quieted, and our troubled thoughts have fled . . . *in pace sunt ea quæ possidet.* (*Luke* xi. 21.)

You know, O Lord, that all our good inclinations come from You, and that apart from You we can never please You; *tibi sine te placere non possumus.* (*Collect* xviii. *Pent.*) Receive my soul which wishes to receive You, and let us remain thus one within the other, prisoners of the same divine love, that love which You have first borne to me, and with which Your grace fills my heart for You. Grant that I may desire nothing but only You, that I may prefer You to all Your gifts, and should You wish to be silent in my company, and to remain inactive, even for long, as in a tomb, give me a spirit of Faith, strong enough to accept Your way with me, to love that way as a special favour, and to rejoice in it into the day eternal.

II

Cœnabo cum Illo
I shall sup with Him
(*Apoc. iii.* 20.)

OUR LORD has Himself said it, else we could never have aspired to such intimacy. He has said "I shall come" as one, that is, who both wishes it and has been invited. He has said that He will seat Himself at our humble board, and share our evening meal, that homely meal of the day, which is so often prolonged under the calm and quiet influence of the night, coming as it does at the hour which shrouds and seems to invite a loving interchange of secrets, and the outpourings of purest friendship. We should learn to know Him thus, the Christ who is at rest with us and gives us rest; the guest of our twilight hour when the great feast of glaring daylight is extinguished and all creation speaks with lowered voice, as though murmuring marvellous secrets in our ears.

Cœnabo cum Illo: I shall sup with Him, as long ago the disciples did in the little town of Emmaus, as His own in the Upper Chamber, when all the doors being closed—*januis clausis*—(*John* xx. 19), His love brought Him into their midst; as His friends at Bethany, and as all their mystic descendants ever since. At this divine feast, I, who have nothing, I who am poor and a beggar will offer Him my daily actions, for that is an acceptable

gift, one on which He does not disdain to feed His redeeming love. *Ego cibo invisibili qui ab hominibus videri non potest, utor.* (*Tobias* xii. 19.) His invisible food is the perfect accomplishment of the Will of His Father. *Meus cibus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* (*John* iv. 34.) All then that I have of conformity to the Will of God, all that goes under the name of resignation, gentleness, courage, abnegation, docility, detachment, all *that* can be offered to Him. All my humble and frail virtues, inspired as they are by His grace . . . all in a word that grows in my poor furrows.

My provisions, Lord, are very scanty. I have thought so little of laying in supplies of supernatural food, and I blush at the sight of what I have to offer You. My want of foresight, my improvidence, has produced my present dearth.

Bring it here, bring Me what there is, even if it should be but a few barley loaves and two fishes. My invisible blessing will multiply your offerings, and I have never yet rejected anything that has been given to Me.

Lord, I dare not offer You the remnants of a love on which others have already fed, I have given part of my life as a prey to the devil and to my own selfishness, how can I venture to put on Your table that for which men have no further use?

Bring it here, bring always. I only ask that your offering to-day shall be made in sincerity, and that you will keep back nothing secretly. In the Upper Chamber they offered Me, at my own request, the remains of some broiled fish—*partem piscis assi.* (*Luke* xxiv. 42.) Understand the mys-

tery hidden in each word of My Gospels, and be neither less simple nor more pretentious than your fathers in the faith.

Lord, I bring You all I have, and my ardent desire is to refuse You nothing. But, You, what do You bring, O noble and beneficent Guest, when You come to this divine supper, which is renewed each evening in the soul that serves You?

What does He bring? He brings His familiar converse, the light and warmth of His speech; He brings words which captivate and bind us to Him for ever. Speak, Lord, speak to me of Yourself, for that is what rests my soul. I am weary of always talking about myself and my affairs, as though I alone were of interest and as if my personality and not Yours were the alpha and the omega of all things. Tell me what You feel, what You have to go through, what You desire, what grieves You. Tell me, not briefly, but in detail, what You have done, and what You still plan to do. Tell it to me sweetly and confidentially, to me Your poor redeemed one. Teach me to play my part as a Mary at Bethany, and may I at length know how to listen when You speak only of Yourself.

And He will tell me over again the story of His hidden life in my soul. He will tell of all the efforts He has had to make, all the divine strategy He has employed to capture me: He will relate my own life to me as seen by Him, and tell me how often He has been obliged to begin His work again, His work within me, which my folly has made so heavy for Him. He will explain how it is that He has never ceased to pursue after

me, nor ever given up the struggle to gain me in spite of all disappointments and failures. My life, my poor human life shown thus, my life related to me by God, in which there is nothing that is not sacred since all speaks of His love; my life, which appears to me now as a divine success, because it brings Him each evening as a guest to my table, this life . . . I accept it all. I shall no longer complain of anything. The remembrance of my sins will even become sweet to me, since My Saviour has sanctified it. *Semper et ubique gratias agere.* (*Preface—Mass.*)

He will tell me also of His plans, of the difficulties He meets with and of the way in which He means to overcome them. He will initiate me into the mysterious secret of His work on earth, and I will give Him all that I have, and humbly try to comfort Him, when the remembrance of bitter sorrow endured will blind His eyes, the eyes of the Good Shepherd, with tears. He will tell me of His great longings; I have other sheep that are not yet of My Fold, *illas oportet me adducere* . . . (*John* x. 16) these I must capture and bring home. Speak to me of those strayed sheep, O Lord, and make me great-souled, even as an Apostle.

Rogate Dominum messis. (*Matt.* ix. 38). The harvests are white in the fields, entreat the Master of the fields to send in the reapers. Speak to me, O Lord, of Your mystic ears of corn, and may my hand be restless till it grasps the sickle.

Vigilate et orate. (*Matt.* xxv. 41.) You must watch and pray, while I suffer and expiate, so that no trial may be able to overthrow the hopes I have

founded on you. Where are those who can watch one hour with Me?

Speak to me of Your loneliness, Lord, of the neglect You have met with, teach me Yourself, *tu mihi loquere solus*. (*Imit. Bk.* i. 3.) Make known to me all Your desires, I listen to You speaking in the stillness of my thoughts, when the day declines and evening falls, and the shadows of my life grow long: *donec aspiret dies et inclinentur umbræ*. (*Cant.* ii. 17.)

And even as He speaks with me, He is being glorified in heaven, the angels extol Him and voices thunder through the clouds in praise of Christ, *et in laudem Christi voces tonant per nubila*. (*Ant. Procession: Palm Sunday.*) But He talks with me; He abides in my house—the house of His publican. It is as if all that glory were as nothing to Him, and I alone were all His care.

We speak together, I listen . . . and thus a life-time passes. Then comes a moment . . . Who can tell what happens? It is as though a veil were rent, and blind eyes opened. A radiance not of earth surrounds Him . . . It is the moment of my passing hence. Blessed death approaches; that death which never interrupts the converse of the soul with its God; but which lets fall all earthly coverings, all mists and veils of faith, and shows us, face to face, our long-loved Guest and Sovereign Master . . . *Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio*. (*Adoro Te.*) Rising from our humble supper board we pass to the supper of the Lamb in the Kingdom of the Father, and for ever.

III

Et Galilæus es
For thou art also a Galilean
(*Mark xiv.* 70.)

HIS love is tenacious and He marks all that is His with an indelible mark, a seal of eternity. Even should we leave Him and lose ourselves in evil company, and stray, through weakness or through malice, into the midst of His most implacable enemies, even then we can be recognized by a something in our views, in our speech, in our actions, that can only have been learnt in His school. The accent betrays the soul that Christ has loved. *Et Galilæus es*—we too are Galileans. We are strangers everywhere unless with Him. Once we have belonged to Him we not only lose the power of withdrawing this gift of ourselves, without incurring loss or danger, but to do so altogether, becomes impossible.

To learn to know Him thus attaches us to Him by a new bond, and makes us fathom something of His unmerited love; it makes us understand a little better the wonderful power of this love; it opens, by faith, the fountains of sorrow and of trust in the very heart of a desert—*in inaquoso*. (*Psalm* cv. 14.)

Let us learn to recognize Him under the modest disguise of grace, which when roughly turned away, does not leave us wholly: *O amator peccatorum* (*Salve mundi . . . Arnulphus Abb. of Villers*); let us dis-

cern Him in the divine fire, which, smothered beneath the ashes of dissipation and accepted selfishness, yet hides in the deepest hollow of the soul, one last spark, and with it the hope of a radiant resurrection.

Let us learn to know Him following in the track of the soul which has escaped from the fold of the Good Shepherd, following it patiently in all its wandering fancies, its foolish extravagances and its dangerous adventures . . . then shall we understand that His love never lets go, that never again can we think and judge exactly as an unbeliever, nor hinder Him from being in reality Our Master.

A Galilean! Lord, when I postpone the total surrender of myself to You to some later day; when I wait for the advent of some magic hour in order to give myself to You and to abdicate my last rights and make over to Your keeping my most sacred hopes; when I evade and dissemble before honestly acknowledging You as Lord and Conqueror; when I count upon possible to-morrows whose dawn, however, is constantly deferred to suit the inclinations of my selfish indolence . . . in all these moments, I am yet a Galilean, and something of You still lives in me. . . For to *put off* the date of Your final and absolute triumph over my pride, is to confess that sooner or later this triumph will be Yours, and to own that I cannot do without You. It is an acknowledgment that every position we assume, which is not that of utter loyalty, is after all but provisional, and that all our boasted security is false. To refuse to pay my debts *at once*, is a lame recognition of the fact that

You are my Creditor . . . *Et Galilæus es* . . . Our awkwardness betrays us, as it betrayed Your Apostle in the courtyard of the High Priest; our awkwardness betrays us and reveals to whom those souls belong who are following afar off indeed, and putting off, till later, the day of faithful service.

Et Galilæus es! We walk with Him for a time, then suddenly, with a vacant look, we turn away our heads and leave Him. We fear that He is about to ask for some service that will call for generosity; that He is perhaps about to ask divinely for an alms, and we don't want . . . at least for the moment we don't want to give it. But we dare not look Him in the face, for we know so well that at one glance from those eyes all our opposition would fade away, and we should fall prostrate at His feet. So we pretend to be busy and absorbed in things outside His service; in this very pretence it is easy to read the secret dread of His power, and the fear of His inevitable exactions.

Et Galilæus es! In order not to hear His call, and in the hope of stifling His unwelcome complaints or loving reproaches in the purposely planned tumult of a conscience that is in hiding, we talk very loud to ourselves, and laugh boisterously with others, we keep up a wearisome and perpetual commotion in our souls; our souls . . . that seek to forget His winning invitations, that amuse themselves and cry aloud like frightened children in the dark, to make others think they are not afraid, and whose childish trick makes known their secret terrors. *Galilæus es!* All these cowardly tricks, these devices and schemes, this great anxiety to

haggle, to evade, to put off, to quibble . . . all these half measures betray a disciple who is ashamed of his discipleship, and who yet cannot destroy its divine mark upon him, nor escape from the strong grasp of redeeming love.

My God, how is it that You are not weary of me, when even in my own eyes my degrading meanness has destroyed all dignity? I meet with tenderness from You in the midst of my unfaithfulness, and I am able in fact to gather ripe grapes from the thistles of my sins! *Quia amabas me*! *fecisti me amabilem*. (*St. Augustine*.) Because You have loved me, you have made me lovable. All my cunning skill applied to throw Your grace off the scent; all my wicked efforts to make myself unlovable in Your sight; all this but makes Your freely-given love glow with a deeper splendour. That love which has first put in me that which it must ever love there; that love which is all-embracing, and from which nothing can escape, any more than a fish can escape from the surrounding waters of the sea.

Quid dicam de te? (*Imit. Bk.* iii. x.) Tell me Your thoughts, and let me learn to judge myself as You will judge me; teach me not to bruise, by unneedful roughness, the bent and quivering reed; nor to crush by impatience and contempt, by a harshness that You never counsel, the still smouldering taper. Teach me to treat myself with respect and love, for Your sake, and out of reverence to that which it has seemed good to You to put within me. Let me keep my unmeasured contempt for everything in my soul or in my life that tries to free itself from

Your loving guardianship, and to assert imaginary claims and pretentions. But, show me, O My God, You who love our souls, how I can, and why I should find everywhere, even in the remembrance of my guilty weakness, tokens of Your persevering love. A ciborium cannot be turned to common uses without profanation, but even after profanation it is still a sacred vessel, and its true place is in the Tabernacle. All my desecrations of my own soul have not hindered You from being still and ever my one Master, and Your sovereign rights have not been impaired either by my persistent refusals, or by my loud-voiced rebellions. I belong to You . . . my very accent has always betrayed me; I am of Your family, of Your homeland of Galilee since the day of my baptism and even before it, since that eternity in which You chose me . . . *ante tempora sæcularia.* (2 *Tim.* i. 9.)

IV

Pone me juxta Te
Place me very near You
(*Job xvii.* 3.)

THAT I may wrench myself free from all that is mediocre, therefore above all from self, may He deign to place me very close to Him, in His shadow and in His light. Very near to Him, as a little child, simple and awkward, who must be helped and held up, and whose natural clumsiness turns the most useful things and the most serviceable realities into so many death-bringing perils and dreaded enemies; as a child who wounds itself by catching hold of knives by their blades and who burns itself by playing with the captivating fire. My God . . . I am that child, that simple, curious, weak child, whatever may be the high figure to which the days of my mortal pilgrimage have attained. Yes, that child is myself, and if I refuse to recognize this fact You will never be able to complete the education of my soul, and I shall not enter with the little ones into the kingdom of heaven. It is I who wound myself so stupidly, taking hold of knives by their blades. I do so each time that I rebel against the trials that Your Providence chooses for me, each time that I complain and murmur, each time that by selfish preoccupations I allow the divine peace, which descends from above, to be troubled in my soul.

There is, however, a way of taking hold of knives and of trials, a way which makes it easy to use them, but which must be learnt that it may be known and put in practice. Your trials have also, as it were, a handle, they have a side, an aspect, by which they can be adjusted to our souls. It is called submission. But submission demands detachment, and that is a word we refuse to hear.

Teach me, O Lord, to avail myself of every occasion, to make use of every event without wounding or bruising myself, teach me to distinguish between good and evil, to resist the mad fascination of all that shines and dances, and is in reality but a cruel and death-bringing flame. There is, however, a way of making use of fire; without it our life itself would be extinguished. Lord, I am a frail and ignorant child; show me how to make use of all that heats and even of all that sparkles and flares so pleasantly while still keeping the distance prescribed by caution and not overstepping the limits of prudence. Teach me to suffer without wounding myself, and to enjoy without being imperilled.

Pone me juxta Te. Place me very close to You, like the mischievous child, giddy and half-wild, whom it is necessary to watch and restrain, off whom we cannot take our eyes for long, and who needs to feel some protecting presence round him, else he would break out in the most nonsensical whims, in the most inconsistent follies and in the most senseless deeds and exploits. For, again, I am that child whose mind is yet unbalanced, and who is incapable of resisting the sudden im-

pulses of his nature; and the only merit I can claim by Your grace is, perhaps, that I do not dream of hiding this fact. Yes, it is I who, coming from prayer, returning from Communion, suddenly break out into the most ridiculous impatience, impulsive anger, peevish roughness, and agressive remarks, without being even able to state clearly the cause of these extravagances. It is I who change my mood because the sky is over-clouded, or who throw up all resolutions guided by the secret counsel of my laziness. Watch over me, Lord, may I be always very near to You, for if I do not know that You see me, and that I am in Your presence, if my faith, increased by Your grace, does not vouch for this, I shall be undone through my folly, and my heedlessness will be the death of Your work within me . . . *Kyrie eleison.*

Pone me juxta Te. Place me very close to You again as the familiar tool, on which You can count, and which will not fail in its work. I see all round me on my writing table those lowly and reliable instruments which, as it were, lengthen my fingers to enable me to write, support my limbs, show me at what pace time is passing, and preserve the memory of all that I forget. Lord, I should like to be able to prolong Your action in the same way, to be Your docile instrument, as near to You as the sword is to the soldier, and the prayer book to the hands which hold it. I wish that You could rely upon me, and make use of all that I have by Your grace, without having first to ask my permission and without fearing to wound my susceptibility. For You have need of fellow-workers, and You have

willed not to complete the work of Your redemption all alone. Place me very close to You, and while You make use of me, teach me to be useful to You.

Pone me juxta Te. Put me very near to You, as the intimate friend to whom is whispered our most secret confidences and our dearest hopes. I know that I am not worthy to hear Your eternal thoughts, and that my heart is not pure enough for You to pour into it Your divine wishes, Your tender and loving desires . . . *Desiderio desideravi* . . . (*Luke* xxii. 15.) But, O Lord, would it not be the only way of purifying it? If You wait to come to me till I, by my own means, heal my poverty and dislodge my misery, I shall be dead, laid low between the boards of my coffin, before I have experienced Your friendship which makes holy.

He binds us to Himself by a mysterious tie; we are to possess Him by our very destitution, and feel ourselves driven towards Him by all the power of our trouble, and the weight of our weakness. Foolish as we are, we should be tempted no longer to believe Him to be indispensable to us on the day we did not feel that without Him all was lacking to us. Therefore He does not wish to cure us all at once, nor to remove all our blemishes; but like the sunlight which returns each day, He never ceases helping us, and it is through our poverty that we get to know Him better, and unite ourselves more closely to Him.

My God, is not all that I need to be found in this one wish: *juxta Te*, near, very near to You? Is not every infidelity a withdrawing from You, and at the starting point of all real misfortunes do we

not find a desertion? When we remain in our place, everything, even death, becomes meritorious and glorious; and the place for me, weak, heedless and capricious as I am, yet loving and longing for You, cannot be far from You. *Juxta Te* . . . this word prolongs itself in the echoes of eternity, since my paradise will be nothing else; it is wholly enclosed in that little formula. May Your watchfulness and Your divine loving-kindness be ever with me, *quia non desinis propitius intueri quos talibus auxiliis concesseris adjwari.* (*Collect S.S. Tiburtius and Susanna.*) All I ask is asked for Your sake, Lord, in remembrance of all You have done for my soul; keep me in Your grace and do not let me escape from You.

V

Rabbi, ubi habitas?
Master, where dwellest Thou?
(*John i.* 38.)

IT is not enough to meet Our Lord by chance, as it were, and to speak with Him by the way. That which satisfies a momentary curiosity is not enough for a faithful friend. The faithful friend, the ardent disciple who has heard him speak to the crowd, must be able to meet Him again at leisure, and stay near to Him—*et apud eum manserunt die illo* (*John* i. 39), the disciple must know where He dwells, and where amongst us is the place of His retirement—*habitavit in nobis* (*John* i. 14), the place to which we are sure to see Him return if we are willing to wait a little; the place where He cannot escape us.

Ubi habitas? We shall not know His permanent dwelling place unless He Himself shows it to us, unless He Himself leads us to it. *Venite et videte.* (*John* i. 39.) We can only reach Him through Himself. We can only make our way to Him, by Him. He is at the same time the road and the goal, the door and the sheep-fold, the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega of all things—*principium et finis.* (*Apoc.* xxii. 13.) Thus only those hearts which His light enlightens, only those souls which His will directs can find Him and dwell with Him. Overstepping all methods, or

rather in the heart of every method and of every practice of perfection, it is His spirit which gives life and sight and movement and light: *Venite et videte.*

His dwelling place? *In nobis* . . . (*John* xvii. 21) amongst us; for the whole world is filled with His unseen presence, and if He appears to be absent our faith assures us that He can only be hidden. He is at the fountain-head of all loyal and pure thoughts, and of all genuine and heartfelt sorrow; and it is my poor soul, innocent or penitent, which is still His dwelling place, the one He wishes never to leave. Master, where dwellest Thou? Make known to me the roads which lead to myself. Disclose to me that deepmost sanctuary which Your voluntary love has contrived for itself in the inmost core of my being, and grant that as I reascend one by one all the paths of my waking life, I may always find Your pitiful grace at their starting-point, forestalling all my beginnings and giving me whatever true worth is mine. Since You have willed to save us all, the mystery of my free will can only be explained by Your presence and Your action. *Ego in eis.* (*John* xvii. 23.) My intellect, too, is illuminated by the brightness of Your revelation, and deep beneath my thoughts I meet again with You.

Ubi habitas? Lord, where dwellest Thou? Lead me to Your home. And he will lead us to that resting-place of His choice in the souls of His saints and of those who love Him, of all those men, known or unknown, who have let themselves be penetrated by His spirit and have opened to Him

the gates of eager docility. That I may see Him in His chosen ones, He must lend me His own eyes, for He alone knows Himself—*sui perfectus cognitor*,—(*St. Thomas: De Fide*) and when, by my fault, this view of faith is darkened in my life, my whole action becomes rough and commonplace, and I profane His dwelling, by disturbing the peace of my neighbour with whom He dwells. Teach me Lord, to reverence You in virtuous souls, make me learn the sweet and restful joy of watching You in silence in hearts devoted to You, in all those who love You, and whom You sanctify. *Venite et videte*. It seems to me that You could make me understand what is that mysterious place within the soul, for that place is You Yourself, *omnia in omnibus*. (*I Corinthians* xv. 28.) It seems to me that if my faith increased, if my inner sight were illuminated, I should see them all—Your chosen ones here below—as real "Christophers," Christ- bearers, God-bearers, and that there would be no place in my judgment, appreciation or behaviour for anything mediocre or base.

Ubi habitas? Lord, where dwellest Thou? He also dwells in the little chances which arise of doing well, or of suffering well. He dwells in these humble homes as in His consecrated Hosts, and beneath the appearances of chance annoyances, of importunate visitors, of disagreeable illnesses, of unprofitable work, of sacrifices claimed, of meritorious obedience . . . under these appearances He is morally present as He is corporally present under the Eucharistic species. And my life passes close to these His dwellings: and the meandering course

of my days meets them at each moment; but I am too blind to notice them and I pass by the chances of doing or of suffering well, as we pass by empty shanties or ruined hovels on our road. *Venite et videte.*

Open my eyes for me, Lord, and may I learn to know You in the humility of these Your lowlinesses, and to meet You in the sanctifying prose of daily duties. For *there* is in truth Your dwelling place; it is in this unpretentious duty, no matter what form it may take, that I am sure to meet You, not only passing by, and as it were by stealth, but stationary, and always present. There, I need never fear illusion. Those who obey You, those who uncomplainingly consent to love their duty, those embrace no phantom when they clasp Your merciful loving-kindness in their suppliant arms; and their voices are not lost in empty air, when in their anguish they call to You for help. You are with them, and quite close to them, or more truly, doing their duty and remaining faithful to it, they dwell with You throughout their whole life . . . *et apud eum manserunt die illo.*

The question we should really ask Him is: *Rabbi, ubi non habitas?* Master, where dost Thou not dwell? You are in me. You are in my neighbour. You are in the events of my life, in my work, in my drudgery, in my sufferings, in all my sacrifices . . . Where then do You not abide, and where can that place be, here below, which shall be without You? He will answer what He has said long since to man, the place where He does not abide is there where self-will dwells and selfishness,

the all-usurping and restless self, aggressive, insolent, sullen and crafty. He will tell us that every place is void of Him which we refuse to yield up to Him, and that His almighty love is stopped short before doors which some meanness, acquiesced in, shuts in His face, and before barriers raised against Him by the desire of an illusory independence, and of a sham emancipation. *Ab omni proprietate evacuatus* . . . (*cf. Imit.* iii. 37, ii. 8.) may I be free from all spirit of proprietorship, from all deliberate clinging to myself, so that no secret cell may remain within me impenetrable to His action, so that He may abide as Sovereign in His mansion; in His mansions, rather, for here below as above in the house of His Father, *mansiones multæ sunt.* (*John* xiv. 2.)

Lord, I am an inattentive disciple, and a forgetful student. The lesson of Your unseen presence, which I have understood to-day, will have to be repeated daily to me, for each day I let it escape my mind, and each day, I am recaptured by that common illusion which relies only on what is perceptible to the senses. Increase my love and my reverence, and may I at last learn to see You where You are, until the day, when to my ever recurring buestion: *Ubi habitas?* You will usher me in for ever to Your eternal Paradise.

VI

Verba delictorum meorum
All that my sins say
(*Psalm xxi.* 1.)

SINCE You do not refuse to forgive them, Lord, our sins also have a message of love to convey, and if we know how to question them aright, they will answer us with a Gospel . . . a good tiding of Redemption. They speak of repentance and of sorrow, but to my natural and earthly-minded soul their language is obscure and confused, and I have never really known what they wished to make me understand. Enlighten me, O my God, refine me through the power of Your Spirit: *qui corda fidelium Sancti Spiritus illustratione docuisti.* (*Collect Pentecost.*)

There is a way of pondering over sins, of meditating on evil done, of regretting past faults, which weakens, paralyses and makes faint-hearted. Perhaps I have not protected myself sufficiently on this side. At times compunction has been made to appear to me as a lonely sadness confronting a vast expanse of ruins; as a mournful verification of an irreparable bankruptcy . . . of a total and final defeat. My poor good desires resulting in nothing; each stage of my spiritual life marked by a crushing defeat; each of my efforts broken in its flight; each of my resolutions collapsing upon itself. And I am invited to walk for long and all alone in the

midst of this debris. I am urged to go through this necropolis, to count carefully all that has failed, all that has been unable to keep its word, or to make good its promise. *Sedebit solitarius et tacebit . . .* (*Jeremias* iii. 28.) This pilgrimage is always heart-breaking when made thus; we do not return stronger from it, but only more desolate and at times more bitter; and when we are told that this pilgrimage must be begun again each day, that it is our best occupation while here below, and that to think of anything else is but to fall into illusion and to expose ourselves to irreparable failure, we accept these exhortations or these commands as a sentence of condemnation, and the remembrance of our sins disgusts and crushes us. Compunction—this word and thing which should be so moving and so familiar—appears to us to be nothing more than a funereal order; and those are not few, perhaps, who had turned away from it, not wishing to take this useless load upon their already too wearied shoulders, and thinking it wrong, or at least not wise, to be for ever reviving a dead past, excavating in swamps, instead of leaving behind us for ever that which no thought, no regret can repair or undo.

Compunction which should feed the Christian soul, which should be supernaturally attractive, cannot surely be this cake of sand, this acrid gluey bitumen bringing illness in its train, which no one can assimilate nor desire to take. And yet when compunction has been reduced to solitary sadness in the presence of our own incapacity, a sadness which, in defiance of all logic, we associate with a firm determination to act quite otherwise in the

future! when compunction is nothing more than the earnest and persevering contemplation of the periodic collapse of a building, backed up by the resolution to rebuild it all—every day!—it is necessarily hard, morose and paralysing, a councillor of discouragement and of deep-felt vexation, the enemy of all that has wings.

Compunction is a means of knowing God, and our past faults are roads which lead us to Christ, since it is down their course that His pardon has come or will come to us. Children count the stars in the hazy firmament of our summer evenings; and each of these stars is a path of light; sinners—we should count our sins in the firmament of our life, for each is a mysterious pathway which divine mercy has trodden in order to overtake us.

Compunction does not consist in being moved to pity over myself, over my weakness and my wanderings—of what use could those solitary tears be! It consists in weeping *together* over a common misfortune and in understanding better a misjudged love. And these tears are lights. There are things which can never be seen but with tear-brimmed eyes, and love that has saved us is one. Far from chilling stoically, or depressing uselessly, compunction softens and strengthens, as every really christian feeling does. Love grows greater through reparation; love needs regret and avowals and repentance, and those know this well, who in the things of earth, to rekindle the flame of a love that is failing, seek instinctively for some motive or at least some pretext for a "reconciliation," for tender reproaches. Love forgiven is strong as

death, and our sins should be a fresh bond, rebinding us to God: *funiculus triplex* (*Ecclesiastes* iv. 12) . . . a threefold cord.

The joint work, bungled by my carelessness, my idleness, my ridiculous folly, is His Redemption in me. When I wish then to repent, I must first of all call to Him. Far from imagining that I must keep timidly in my lonely corner, weeping in solitude like a child that has been punished, until my regrets shall have made me worthy of Him, I must understand that without Him I can repair nothing, reconquer nothing, and that the very first movement which brings me back towards Him is the effect of His grace, which has come to seek me. *Pastor agnorum regalium*! (*Clement of Alexandria.*)

Then repentance becomes sweet to me; instead of being a solitary and heart-breaking walk in the midst of tombs, it is a pilgrimage of love on which I shall set out with Him. I examine myself as carefully as ever. But I no longer fear to find that I am guilty, on the contrary, I seek with holy eagerness for all my failures, I accuse myself almost without measure, even there where Jesus gently excuses me; I pile up the injuries done, I increase and exaggerate my debts . . . for each of my faults is a magnificent and indisputable proof of His love, being as it is a relic of His pardon. How easily then we understand the Christian need of truth even if it is humiliating truth, a need that false wisdom has declared to be morbid, the need of repeated confessions, of examinations of conscience renewed each day: and how far removed from the Catholic mind, from the mind of the Redeemer are

all those—even though they do not know it—who reject, distrust and lessen these holy practices of repentance, of remembrance of our faults, of contrition and of tears of sorrow. Compunction is divine and revealing—for it shows us God the Comforter. *Lætitia sempiterna* . . . (*Isaias* xxxv. 10) everlasting joy . . . is it my sin or my virtue that is its cause? And to repeat my *peccavi* (*Luke* xiv. 18) to rehearse my old *mea culpa* is sweet to me as an assurance of His love, and as a pledge of His infinite mercy. It is He who then says to me "Weep not, be comforted" . . . *Noli flere; confortare—consolamini; populo meus.* (*Luke* vii. 13; *Isaias* li. 6, l. 1.) He can console to the uttermost, for it is He alone, in reality, who has suffered from all that has made me guilty.

VII

Fatigatus ex itinere
Weary from the journey
(*John iv.* 5.)

TO become like Our Lord there is no need to change the conditions of our earthly existence, there is no need to cease to be a man; we have only to cease being human in the wrong way, that is to say, to keep apart and cut off from Him. He has sanctified the lowliest realities of our life, for He has made His own the "weakness of our substance" *fragilitatis substantiam.* (*Preface, Ascension.*) And because He has Himself known what it is to be wearied out, weariness has become a divine thing.

This poor human frailty, this weariness which we know so well, and which always seems to us to be a dull and senseless barrier between our soul and God; this miserable weariness which fetters our prayer, benumbs our energies and slows down the first transports of zeal, this age-long languor of our race, which all men look on as an enemy, may yet be the bearer of a message of light to our souls. Lacking the true spirit of a Christian, we have perhaps misunderstood it, been troubled as at an apparition—*putaverunt quia phantasma est.* (*Mark* vi. 49.) It is a sign to be contradicted.

The weariness that follows on days of exhausting labour, when, as evening falls, the poor body

falters and gives way, when sleep clouds our thoughts and physical discomfort, reaching almost to an agony, takes entire possession of us . . . Can it be that we are of any more worth than a senseless machine, since this periodic collapse of our powers reduces us to this pitiable helplessness! Can it be possible that in the slow hours of this our physical weakness we are still worthy to appear before God? To be admitted to the Divine presence should we not have an awake and vigorous mind, a prompt and eager will, eyes that sparkle and arms stretched forth to labour? . . . *Fatigatus ex itinere* . . . To be like God there is no need to strain to reach these dizzy heights, no need to stretch the springs of our soul to breaking point. To meet God we need not first escape from human weakness, nor pretend that it is non-existent. We need play no lying part, need borrow no conventional attitudes. It is enough to be merely a man to become like to the Son of Man. So long as we never descend to the level of sin, we are on a footing with Him who has known in His own person each one of our miseries: *tentatum . . . per omnia pro similitudine absque peccato* (*Heb.* iv. 15) . . . One tempted in all things like as we are, without sin.

He has known this pitiable weariness of ours. He has known it as we know it, felt its weight, its constraint, its humiliation. Those who refuse to believe in such condescension on His part, and who deny that He has felt our frailties, and been weary with our weariness, measure the things of God by human standards, and know nothing of the spirit of God. "If Christ be not risen, our hope of

resurrection is vain." So, too, if Christ has not suffered, it will only be in spite of suffering, outside its realm, and by opposing it that we may join ourselves to Him, and hope to meet Him. But Christ is the Truth, and when in the days of His pilgrimage He rested on the edge of a well, it was because He felt very weary. He had exhausted His strength in traversing the long roads of earth. Thus weariness is a divine thing, and when I can do no more I am like to Him.

Help us, O Lord, to understand this mystic sacrament of Christian weariness; teach us that to be tired may yet be sanctifying, because something of You is found therein. Every worn-out man recalls the Man of Sorrows, and at the root of all our physical weakness is hidden that secret bond which binds them to the One who has first borne them all—*dolores nostros ipse portavit* (*Isaias* liii. 4) . . . He has borne our sorrows.

We often ask ourselves what is there that we can offer to God that will not be unworthy of His acceptance. We look all round about and see how few are our possessions and how great that misery which is so well known to Him—*tibi undique notam*—(*Imit. Bk.* iii. 20) and we can find no incense to place on the glowing embers of His invisible censers—*habens thuribulum aureum*. (*Heb.* ix. 4.)

Now, however, we begin to understand, and our poverty may even become sweet to us. Nothing is worthy of His acceptance unless He first makes it so, not only by accepting it from without, as offered by command, but by sanctifying it from within by the penetrating action of grace. That

alone can be offered to Him which is already His, that alone can delight Him which He has first made lovable. We may then offer our weariness and our weakness, our tedious languor and that dark heaviness which takes possession of us periodically and only at rare intervals leaves us wholly free. We may place all this in the invisible censer as a perpetual and silent homage. We can put there all that "*odor mortis*" (2 *Corinth.* ii. 16) which since He has slain the slayer—*extinctor necis*—(*Hymn Brev: Paschal time*) has about it the fragrance of eternity.

Our pitiable fatigue! The weariness that humbles us, that turns the thoughts in our mind and the words in our sentences upside down! That weariness so full of aching stupidity, of gloomy stupor, of nervelessness and powerlessness, that seems the inheritance of a slave, that was familiar to the chosen people when they carried their baskets full of clay and bricks in the land of Egypt . . . even this can trace His likeness sweetly in us, if we accept it with and for Him, resigned, and without bitterness or anger. All human weariness belongs to Him, as long as it is not sinful. It may then all be offered to Him, for nothing that is His is unworthy of Him. Our poverty wins the kingdom of heaven for us, and when we are powerless it is in order that He who is Almighty may alone uphold us.

We have then found our morning and our evening sacrifice: *sacrificium vespertinum*, *matutinum*. (*Psalm* cxl. 2.) We know now that we can put into our "baskets" at the moments when we

seem most destitute. And when at length the weariness of life becomes too great for our sick and worn-out bodies, when at last all struggle and all war shall have ceased within us; when weariness has conquered in our death, then, O Lord, receive this last act of homage, this last breath of the perfume of Your love within us—*fatigatus ex itinere*. Yes, weary from our journeyings on the many roads of life, weary from having walked so far! When we can no more, and when our hour—Your hour—has come, the hour that no man knows, remember, O Lord, that You too learnt, with labour, to suffer as we suffer, and that as a deposit entrusted to Your keeping all our weakness is laid up: *didicit ex eis quæ passus est.* (*Heb.* v. 8.)

We can then love this blessed weariness, this heaviness which You have sanctified. And we can understand those friends of Yours who rejoice to feel their body wear out, their strength fail, their life fade away in the hard labour that Your sweet Providence imposes in mercy on us. O joy of weary evenings, of days of fasting, of nights of watching, when the body moaning forth, after its fashion, some mute misery, the soul yet gives the answering cry of Alleluia.

VIII

Lecythus olei
A cruse of oil
(3 *Kings* xvii. 14.)

THE disciples of Our Lord are always distrustful and their restless anxiety hinders His peaceful actions and puts an obstacle to His work of grace. He described us all in a word when, on the road to Emmaus, He reproached us with being "foolish and slow of heart to believe," with not daring to rely upon His word.

That anticipated discouragement, which we call mistrust, is too natural to us to be anything but folly. Hearts are rare indeed which have never been invaded by this cunning enemy. Even when it has withdrawn for a time, even when some realization of Divine goodness forces back the inundation of pusillanimity and the rising flood of mistrust, there remains behind a death-bearing deposit, in which, as in a bed of adhesive clay, our good desires are choked, and every glow of genuine trust in God is stifled as it comes to birth.

What is this false wisdom, through which the old error is kept alive within us, and what blessing of God can drive it into exile? *Vetus error abiit.* (*Isaias* xxvi. 3.) This error old as the race, which is seated, like a beggar in rags, on the threshold of so many souls, whence comes it? This old mistake of cowardice and distrust is so often met with that

it seems in the end to be almost a necessity of our nature. Whence comes it, and by what right has it established itself so close to us?

We are at times discouraged, always pusillanimous because we stake our security on a fragile and tottering support. We aim at establishing the peace of our soul and the pledge of our worth on the purely natural opinion which we are ourselves able to form of our capabilities and of our deserts. We question ourselves anxiously, we try to estimate the reserve of energy which we have at our command, we busy ourselves with the stethoscope that we may know ourselves more intimately, we analyse ourselves that no appearances may deceive us; we lose endless time in calculating what we might have done formerly, if . . . what we may yet perhaps be able to do later, when . . . and it is on all these empty speculations that we hope to build up our confidence. Precarious, frail supports, and crazy props, which have themselves to be underpinned daily, and yet totter at the slightest shock.

It is not on the consciousness that we have of our own abilities, that our trust should rest, but on the merciful goodness of Him who never abandons those whom His Father has given to Him, that He might keep them in life: *quos dedisti mihi non perdidi ex eis quemquam.* (*John* xviii. 9.) Our certainty and our security rest on faith, and that which keeps us at peace with ourselves is something which has a very real existence though it is invisible.

When the prophet Elias, in the name of God, blessed the oil of the poor widow of Sarepta, this blessing also remained invisible. At the bottom of

the little earthen pot there were still but a few drops of oil—*paululum olei in lecytho*—(3 *Kings* xvii. 12), and at the sign of the prophet the vessel was not filled, it remained apparently just as it had been . . . but as these drops were poured out they renewed themselves in proportion to the need of the moment, no more, so that the pot while always on the point of becoming empty, yet always contained enough oil to secure the household against want.

God works in our souls in just this same way. Each day He gives us the measure of grace that is sufficient for us; but He never allows us to feel that we are plentifully supplied for all our needs, and that we possess a store that is inexhaustible. This ordinary sense of security which comes with the assured possession of our hoarded wealth; this quiet confidence of the farmer who has gathered in his harvest; this security that comes with ownership has nothing in common with the spirit of faith, and yet it is just the kind of security that we all long to attain.

To *feel* that we are strong and rich and powerful; to *feel* at least that the divine coffers into which we are allowed to thrust our hands, are inexhaustible and are open to our every call; to *feel* that we are not depending on anything, but may sleep in peace sheltered from all risk and from all need, that is the state which always appears to us to be the most enviable. The condition, that is, of those who possess. It is with difficulty that we can bring ourselves to do without marks of esteem, not so much because we long to be flattered, as that we pine to be reassured: less that is to say from vanity

than from weakness, less from the desire to know what others think of us, than from the hunger to know what we may think of ourselves. God wishes to free us from this bad habit. He wishes to teach us to place our confidence in Him and to disengage ourselves from the opinions we have formed about ourselves. *Quod es hoc es, nec major dici vales quam Deo teste sis.* (*Imit. Book* ii. 6.) As soon as we give up this search for security within ourselves, when we relinquish the right to appraise our souls at their true worth to Him who has been appointed judge of the living and the dead, then a great peace will settle down upon us, and an immense sense of relief. For the burden of anxiety as to what we are really worth and what we can count upon ourselves to do, a burden borne by so many, is a heavy one and has never yet been of the smallest use to any one.

Our confidence rests upon unceasing dependence. Each day God will give us the drop of oil that is necessary for us, at each moment the measure of grace that is sufficient, and thus, feeling ourselves perpetually upheld, yet never able to walk alone; realizing that we are fed each day and yet never cease to be hungry, we attach ourselves to God by one of the deepest fibres of our being; our poverty itself binds us straitly to Him. It is this very destitution, perpetually made good, yet never removed, which renews, as it were, the Redemption within us by making us realize how much we need our God. *Lecythus olei non est imminutus.* (*3 Kings* xvii. 16.) The cruse of oil was not diminished. I know God well enough to be sure that He will

not forget me to-morrow any more than He forgot me to-day, and I know that His mercy is everlasting. And so when I rejoice, when in the midst of deeply felt and even overwhelming trouble I can yet sing and work as though as free from care as the birds of the air, my trust is full of adoration, and my joy is a worship that nothing could replace. *Scio cui credidi.* (2 *Tim.* i. 12.) I know in whom I have believed.

Unhappily our short-sighted wisdom understands little of these lessons. Preoccupied as we are with the desire to please God, we do not realize that Without God, or far from Him, we cannot become worthy to please Him; *tibi sine te placere non possumus.* (*Collect* xviii *Pent.*) Longing to meet Him we have not understood that it is by His side that we must walk to meet Him; He alone can bring us to that trysting-place which His love has chosen for us. Wishing to appear of worth in His eyes, we forget, or rather we have never known that we can have no other value than that which He recognizes in us, having first placed it there Himself. We find it hard to put all our glory, and to find all our joy in being just simply the redeemed. Bought back at a price! At the starting point of all that we are, we must establish His grace, and this one word kills all distrust.

IX

Colligite fragmenta
Gather up even the crumbs
(*John vi.* 12.)

THERE is nothing little for a real love; and he who says "it is only a little thing," in speaking of the suffering which he has caused, or of the happiness which he has destroyed, has never known what love is, nor understood the meaning of charity.

Little things, therefore, have always been sacred in the eyes of faith; and not to trouble about them, to assume towards them the contemptuous arrogance of the wise ones of the world, is to condemn ourselves to remain fundamentally commonplace, and to be strangers to all that is refined.

These little things are a hidden treasure which supernatural insight enables us to find in the field of the Father of the family; these little things are our whole life which passes through our fingers in minute grains of time; these little things are the sum of courage, which our will divides among short-lived actions; these little things are dew-drops of divine grace—*stillæ super gramina*—(*Deuteronomy* xxxii. 2.), portions of the Holy Sacrifice, the lamp of the sanctuary, the bell of the altar, the silent curling wreaths of incense which scent the air. *Colligite fragmenta:* let nothing be lost of that which Christ has sanctified; the only great thing is the harvest

gathered of the little sheaves, and the sheaf made up of the slender stalks, and the ear of corn in which cluster the little grains of wheat given to us by God.

But if the care of little things is obligatory, it is no less so to understand the spirit which should animate this solicitude, and to know why it is good to glean in the furrows where the sickle has passed.

Is it a fatigue-duty that is imposed on us? Is it a heavy and painful obligation? Are we as those working by the piece who will be called upon to settle their accounts, and who think of nothing unless it be how to keep their countenance, and prepare answers for that decisive moment? Is it only by a kind of minutely detailed fidelity, a meddling scrupulosity, that we are to constrain ourselves to finish all our tasks, and to avoid all negligence? We shall work throughout the livelong day, watching ourselves unceasingly, carrying out our programme point by point, verifying, collating, comparing, to be sure that we have passed over nothing, letting all our attention be absorbed in our tasks; and by dint of wishing to do well we shall become unable to think of anything but our business. We shall develop into something as regular and as passive as a mechanical movement, and shall know no other joy than that of saying to ourselves each evening: All is as it should be; I have counted everything, verified everything, I may sleep on the pillow of my precision.

Does the care of little things mean no more than a command to be precise? No, we must go further than that: the care of little things is the homage of fidelity, and the gratification of one of love's great

needs. We are never far from Him! We do not work under His eyes, for He is not a mere onlooker, He is a fellow-worker and a friend. Before He exacts anything from us, He forestalls all our wants. Precision in the accomplishment of His will is but submissive fidelity to correspond with His inspirations. How attractive little things should be to me, O God my Redeemer, Who love me such as I am!

Nothing in me is negligible in Your eyes, and that is why all is important, why all should be sanctified, why all is a response and a homage. We shall work together then to make me such as You would have me to be.

Colligite fragmenta . . . He notices the way in which I walk and when my pace is more precipitate than it should be, or more languid than is becoming, He is pained, as one is pained by a defect in a person loved. My bearing and my gestures preoccupy Him: and when they are exaggerated, or too frequent, unruly or merely flippant, He is saddened, for He wants me to keep them simple and restrained. He observes the expression of my countenance, and the tone of my voice: when I raise it, when it grows loud in a wave of anger, when it grates with irritability or temper, when it drawls with nonchalance and listlessness, He suffers as one suffers from a want of good manners, an uncouthness more or less accepted, in those one loves and of whom one wishes to be proud. He cares about everything, since nothing is unconnected with His will; the paper I take to write upon, the words which my mind dictates to my pen, even the

stains on my clothes, and the details of my dress, the swiftness of my glance, and the curl of my lip... everything is noted by Him, to be approved or deplored by His love.

And this is what I must understand if I would grasp what is really meant by the care of little things. These tiny details are not small change with which to pay for future glory and eternal rewards; they are first and foremost demands made by Him, but demands full of friendliness. They are an answer and a homage which I can and should offer to Him.

Colligite fragmenta. Nothing seems trivial to a great love, and if I believe in the love of my God, if I am convinced that this love is all embracing, that He takes me as I am and intends to change me wholly; if I succeed in persuading myself that nothing is trivial, but that all is but proof of tender fidelity, then I shall be able to avoid, on the one hand, that cramping cowardice which is engrossed in itself, and on the other that false liberty of spirit which disdains to gather up the fragments of the divine gift which is our life, the crumbs of heavenly food which is the grace of Christ.

Give me, O my God, that which is wanting to me. I waver perpetually between a meticulous and frightened narrowness, and a cool and dreamy negligence. You alone can establish me in truth, which is justice, and which, putting each thing in its rank and each being in its place, and illuminating all with true light, re-establishes order in our souls and harmony in our efforts. I know too well the sorrowful remorse felt for having failed You in

what is called a "little thing." I know by experience that there are sacred and unspoken pacts between us, which no one has ever guessed at, and which gently call for attentions towards You, for the courtesies of fidelity, and for a proud and filial glory in the accomplishment of all duties, which in fact are Your desires. When people encourage me or seek to console me for my failures, even for those which are but passing weaknesses, by saying "it is nothing or not much," You know, Lord, that those trivial words, those commonplace expressions pain me like the touch of a hot iron. I know Your love too well to measure out thus what I owe You, to reserve my own part in the holocaust and not to wish for Your reign to be absolute. Guide me and help me to understand that You exact nothing from afar off, as a heavy burden, but that, very nigh unto the souls that are Your own—and all are that by their calling—You entreat. Let us work together; my misery will become sweet and fruitful, and having nothing that is mine, I shall be wholly Yours.

X

Singulis manus imponens

Laying His hands on every one of them

(*Luke iv.* 40.)

HE cured them in days of old by this kindly and most merciful action. He cured them all . . . *sanabat omnes* . . . (*Luke* vi. 19) those who cried aloud to Him, and those who looked at Him without a word, those who came of their own accord and took their place by the way which He must pass, and those who were brought to Him from afar on stretchers and pallets, crippled with infirmities, or wasted by lingering illness; all those whose only claim on His love was their need and their misery.

Singulis; for each one of them He had some special attention, for each one He repeated His gesture of blessing. His actions are gospels: His movements are eternal lessons; that which He did in days gone by, He never ceases to do again, and His mission of redemption is continued unseen and mysterious in the hiding-places of the soul. He passes by again amongst us, He walks through the ranks of men who are ill, exhausted, paralysed. He passes laying His hands on *every one*.

I have never yet really understood this action of divine love, and yet to do so marks the beginnings of an interior life, both conscious and steady; it indicates the awakening of the soul to personal and deep

devotion. It is under the hands of Christ that all must be born again; as it is into the hands of the Saviour that all must commit themselves when dying. *In manus tuas*. (*Luke* xxiii. 46.)

I must then understand that He has stood still before me, before me all alone, that He has taken notice of my particular misery, and that it is really on my head that He has placed His divine hands.

So long as we look on ourselves as lost in a nameless crowd of the faithful; so long as we imagine that the words of Christ are uttered in general to a chance audience; so long as we think that His promises, destined for all, are not to be applied to anyone in particular; so long as religion remains a vague and collective duty, *so long* the Christian soul is still asleep. Then a day comes when through the grace of Him "who has never hardened any heart" light breaks, suddenly it may be or gradually; an intimate realization, a purely spiritual thrill, a presence, felt and mysterious, warns us that it is to us personally that God is speaking. We perceive, as it were, His approach, we feel that two all-powerful eyes are fixed on our eyes; that a sign which is only for us calls us to attention. He comes, and I am the term, the goal of this coming; He walks, and it is towards me that He directs His steps, He has marked me out in the crowd, He has recognized me, and through my whole soul there passes, as it were, a dread that is at once pleasant and purifying, mingled of desire, of transport, of fear and of suffering. He who advances towards me is He whom "man shall not see and live," and it is also He who gives life,

and raises up into joy, even those who dwell in tombs: *qui habitant in sepulchris*. (*Mark* v. 3.)

Singulis manus imponens: When the consecrating Bishop imposes hands on those whom he ordains, at this simple contact the newly made priest realizes that all has been changed for him. A special calling has laid hold of him, one that will never again leave him free to dispose of himself as he pleases, but will stamp everyone of his actions and all his desires with an invisible seal. All in him must bear the mark of his priesthood.

When, O Christ, shall I at length understand that it is really with me that You have something to settle, when shall I realize practically that we have a great business to discuss between us, and when shall I value at its true worth, and love as I should, this touch of Your divine hands on my head, the head of a submissive and consecrated disciple? All in me should become Christian.

I am not one among millions; there are no "millions," there is only You and I, for it is in You, and through You, and not beside You or in spite of You, that I should see my neighbour. The words which You utter, the considerate encouragement, the thanks whispered in a low voice, all that is for me, as also the friendly reproaches and the sorrowful words of warning; *singulis manus imponens:* It is my turn . . . and You are wholly at my service; and since Your perfections never wane, what You are for me, You are always, and my whole life should pass under Your hands which bless. It is always "my turn," for You never abandon Your undertakings, and Your Spirit which

sanctifies has not to begin again several times in order to complete His work.

May I then feel Your divine hands resting on me, may I abide before You for ever, and through Your grace, may that haze of unreality, that mist of convention and of mirage be dispersed, which has for so long hindered me from seeing You near to me, and has made me think that You only cared about me in general, with all the rest, and, as it were, *en bloc*.

Consecrate me to Your service. As You look down on my bowed head, that look will make my idols fall, and I shall no longer be able to keep within my soul all my false gods of selfishness, all my chosen bonds, all my crooked and tenacious desires, all that hinders me from being truly Yours, and which impedes Your holy work in my soul. *Manus imponens:* I have faith in Your all-powerful grace, and I believe that through You I can be made worthy of You.

Manus imponens: Yes, Lord, as on a sick person, as on one worn by a lingering illness, who, weighed down by a heavy and painful stupor, does not himself even know what he is suffering from, nor from what danger he must be rescued. I am before You as a paralytic, I, who am always so slow to follow You, and who no longer dare think of all my cowardly evasions. Long since I should have taken up my place . . . had myself carried . . . to waylay You as You passed, on the "paths pacific" where You are to be found, to petition of You alone the end of all my deep misery, those miseries unknown to man, and of which You alone

—even better than myself—have divined the secrets. Cure me by Your divine touch, by the imposition of those redeeming hands, of those hands which hold the heavens and the earth, which grasp unseen the keys of hell and of the kingdom. Cure me of my fears and of my sleepiness, of my outbreaks of roughness, and of my dangerous whims, of my thoughtless impulses and of my calculated affectations: yes, cure me, You who can do everything and whose loving-kindness never draws back from any need. It is my turn, *singulis manus imponens*, I am one of Your own, one of those whom You have come to seek, and I need to be purified and made holy until that day when You Yourself will be my holiness and my justice, until the day when the power of Your redeeming work will have reached its fullness in me, and when eternity will seal my loyal surrender to Your will.

While awaiting this revelation of Your glory, let me look at You, O my God, let me see that You look at me: *sicut oculi servorum in manibus dominorum suorum!* (*Psalm* cxxii. 2.)

XI

Dum nescit ille
Whilst he knoweth not
(*Mark iv.* 27.)

I HAVE often been troubled, Lord, as to what I was worth in Your eyes. I have been worried about my progress in virtue; I have asked myself anxiously "Am I advancing, and at what rate? am I perhaps falling back, and how much? or can it be that I am merely marking time, and since when?" I have encumbered my soul with many useless cares, and the serene peace of an active faith has slipped out through thousands of invisible rents, and I have found myself as a land without water . . . *sicut terra sine aqua tibi.* (*Psalm* cxlii. 6.)

I beg of You to teach me how we can be unceasingly watchful to lose nothing of Your gift, without wearying our souls with blundering human anxiety, and without bringing in to the inner Cenacle any morbid clamorous desire, any troublesome guest who grumbles or is terror-stricken, who importunes or unnerves us. Between the carelessness which puts up with anything, even with what is mediocre or bad, and the too human anxiety which craves daily for reliable verifications and palpable results; between the listlessness which cares nothing for spiritual progress, and the pre-occupation which consumes and ruins itself with the enumeration of

signs and symptoms, grant that Your calm strong wisdom may guide me in the paths of peace and light, *ad lucem quam inhabitas.* (*Hymn Matins C. Christi.*)

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a seed, which springs up in the field, where, by chance, a passer-by one day has thrown it. He who cast the seed seems to have no further anxiety about it. He rises and sleeps, he goes and comes, he slumbers and eats, leaving the seed and the earth to their patient and mysterious work. *Ultro enim terra fructificat* . . . (*Mark* iv. 28) "For the earth of itself bringeth forth fruit," first a green blade that quivers in the wind, a slender and shivering stem, *primum herbam* . . . (*Mark* iv. 28) then little by little the blade becomes a stalk, and on the top of the stalk an ear of corn swings to and fro: *deinde spicam* (*Mark* iv. 28) and in the ear finally, the closely set and savoury grains of wheat are seen to form and grow: *plenum frumentum in spica.* (*Mark* iv. 28.) And the almost fortuitous action of this chance wayfarer, who cast the seed into the earth, has ended in the harvest, and summons the reapers from afar: *statim mittit falcem quoniam adest messis.* (*Mark* iv. 29.)

If I had more confidence in the efficacity of Your supernatural action, Lord, it seems to me that my co-operation in Your work within me would be free from anxiety, and that all impatience would vanish from my soul. May it suffice me to abide always very near to You, to work in union with Your grace and may all superfluous solicitude be banished from a life of which You are the

strength, and of which You should be the end.

For long I thought that there were human and natural industries, which could do duty for Your grace, or hasten its action; I thought that by taxing my ingenuity, by splitting hairs, by urging myself on, I could do better than You Yourself could do, and surpass Your desires; I thought—it is always the same illusion—that the work of sanctity was an enterprise, before being an acceptance; that it was a personal initiative, before being a respectful answer, that it was for me to begin the great work first, whereas my first act should be to thank You for having already begun it in me, by Your grace forestalling all my desires.

And that which You have done in me, You continue to do. Father of the Family . . . it is You who lay up heavenly treasure for me; it is You who keep safe all my earnings, since it is through You and in You that I acquire them. What I am, I have no idea; what I am worth, You see; but I have one longing left, a longing which Your grace itself prevents me from renouncing, and which grows daily stronger with all the realization of my misery: the longing to respect You ever more as my Sovereign, and to love You ever more as my Saviour: the longing to possess nothing as my own—above all not my virtues—and to see You in all that I am, in all that I do, for You alone can make me bearable to myself, and prevent me from being disgusted with my virtues. I shall love them because I shall find in them a memorial of You, Your handwork, Your love, Your footprints. I shall love them because You have sown their seeds

in me, and because being divine seeds—*desursum* (*James* i. 17)—they have found in my soul a soil which Your grace alone could make fruitful. I love them, all these blades of corn which are my merits, which go by the names of my mortifications, my sacrifices, my vows, my prayers, my repentance, my hopes; I love them because all these sheaves are in reality Your harvest, and because they proclaim Your glory—*Rex Christe, virtus fortium qui magna solus efficis.* (*Hymn Vesp. Com. Martyrs.*)

What need then for me to seek for reassurance by the verification of the growth of these virtues, Is it not enough for me to put all my strength into the effort of submission, trusting to Your love for the completion of my tasks, and postponing to the eternal vision all final valuation and restful certitude. *Dum nescit ille*: to measure virtue by the knowledge we have of it is a gross blunder, and would overthrow the peace of our soul at every moment. We must know how to leave things to Him, and watch only that we may work with Him as best we can; we must think of Him more than of ourselves, of His glory more than of our worth, of His favours rather than of our deserts, or better still, since our merits are His favours, and our worth makes His glory, and since *we* means really *He*, we must look on these realities in their divine bearing, with His eyes, in the true light of their beginning . . . *coronando nostra merita coronas Tua dona.* (*cf. St. Augustine, Sermon* clxx.)

Shall we not find in this uprightness of intention a beatitude of destitution? Will there not be a heavenly savour of spiritual poverty in this forget-

fulness of self and this impossibility of thinking of ourselves and for ourselves, except in God and for God? It is not a question of remaining in darkness, but of being content with His light alone, as that heavenly Jerusalem of which He is the sole lamp. It is not a question of waiting in idleness, and of keeping our powers inactive, but of restraining our craving for independence, by subjecting all our activities to His rule, and working with Him to the utmost of our power. To be wholly a disciple; to be no longer anything but faithful: these two well-worn words should be enough to express us: *quod his abundantius est, a malo est.* (*Matt.* v. 37.) We shall only be in peace when we are what we should be; and we should only be *docility* in act and *surrender* without reserve. Peace without illusion, without flare, without false rest or earthly dreams, the peace of paradise which You prepare for me, *dum nescit ille*—without my suspecting it, and, as it were, unknown to me—give it to me, Lord, in purity, in truth and in justice.

XII

Unde et memores

Whence also, mindful of . . .

(*Liturgy, Mass.*)

MY soul, still so earthly-minded, is unaware of the sanctity of remembrance. Too often I see in it nothing more than an agreeable means of relieving the dull insipidity of the present, or of embroidering exquisite designs on the monotonous background of everyday life. When the sights that meet my eyes irritate or weary me, I take refuge in my memories, and I unroll before my inner gaze, as a consolation or a retort, the picture of all that is no more, Memories, I use them for delight or for play, to stir up regrets or to distract myself, to feed my sorrows or to strengthen my ambitions; I use them to prop up my hopes or to barricade myself behind my pusillanimous distrust. I use them as some plastic material, as some mere remnant, paltry or precious, which I may make the most of and mould to my fancy, without being obliged to give an account to anyone of the use to which I have put it. I treat my memories as though they depended solely on me and as if their use concerned me alone; I treat them as the fisherman treats the fish of the sea, casting his nets to right or left, in front or behind, plunging ata venture into the immense hunting-grounds of the ocean, caring only to secure a plentiful haul.

All that is very pagan, and that rash seizure of God's treasure is like a sacrilege. Does not my past belong to Him, as well as my future? And my memories . . . penetrated with the fragrance of His grace, steeped in His redeeming virtue, that "virtue which goes out from Him," are not these memories holy things, relics of His light and His love? And when I use them for my pleasure or my folly, I imitate that puerile irreverence of the King of Babylon who profaned the sacred vessels at his banquet, drinking to excess in the golden chalices of the temple of Jehovah. Teach me, O my God, "to remember" as I should, to use this holy power in a Christian way, to treat the past which lives within me as a gift of love, and as a touching pledge of Your partiality for me. *Accipe memoriam!* (*Sume et suscipe.*)

Has not the Holy Spirit given Him, who is my Redeemer and my sole Master, the name of "He that was" *qui erat?* (*Apoc.* i. 4.) All my past has been seen by Him; all that has been good and beneficial in it has been inspired by Him; He has endured it, and forgiven in it all that my perversity or weakness has mingled there of guilt or slovenliness. I cannot then isolate a single instant of my former history, I cannot separate from the action of the Eternal Word a single phase, no matter how small a one, of the development of humanity and of the universe. He stands at all beginnings. He is before all beginnings, before Abraham the father of the faithful, and before the first man, the father of sinners. When I endeavour to ramble through my memories, as through an

immense and lonely park, as in "a garden enclosed" of which I alone have the key and in which I alone know the paths, I forget that He is the "Faithful witness" *testis fidelis* (*Apoc.* iii. 14), that He has seen all and knows all, that He has been the contemporary of my soul in all its failures and all its renewals. Memory is then a royal road, by which I should go to God, and down whose long way He himself comes towards me. Memory is a long-drawn-out colloquy, a hymn of thanksgiving, which consumes my past as incense: *sicut incensum in conspectu Tuo.* (*Liturgy, Mass.*)

Memory—full of Him—giving grave serenity to my thoughts, a pondered and deliberate nobility to my character, and a gentle and attractive dignity to all my ways! Is not all true greatness steeped in memory? Is not all tradition, all fidelity, all self-sacrifice; the qualities of race, of family, of country; is not all that supports us, all that makes us advance rooted in the memory of a past which rises up within us as the sap in the trees?

Alas—I am always a runaway, always transient, lost in the short present, without the calm of distant outlooks, without the horizons of eternity. I am always in a hurry, panting with wild desires—so foolishly ambitious are they, that I dare confide them to no one. Desires which the present never allows to blossom, and which fall in numbers on the soil of my soul, as disbanded soldiers whose courage is of no avail.

Memories! Recall my past, not as if it were something blotted out, not as an irreparable ruin, as a vanished dream, as a lost happiness, but rather

as a reality that remains, as a treasure kept for me by a faithful friend and which has never ceased for a moment to be mine. Earthly and human memories are continually consumed by the moth and rust; the reality which these memories show us is worm-eaten and without brilliancy; *tinea corrumpit.* (*Luke* xii. 33.) But if I keep within me Him who keeps all by the power of His word; if I dwell with Him, in whom dwells all fullness; if I see Him in all my past, see Him who is the eternal and unchangeable light of my life, what then could be lost to me as I pass from one day to another, and from birth to death?

Memores! Make for myself a consecrated memory, consecrated as a Church; divine and holy, penetrated with the breath of Grace, and living on favours received. Receive my memory, O my God, not in order to take it away from me—the meaning of such a prayer could well be questioned—but so that it may be Yours and not mine; so that it may no longer speak to me of anything but You, and may educate me to fulfil my function of praise, my profession of a believer, and my role of eternal adorer. Be the sole object of my remembrance; You Yourself, and Your gentle attentions, and Your generous forgiveness. Memory thus understood would restore me to myself in easy recollectedness, and quite spontaneously I would close my eyes and join my hands. I would understand the deep meaning of "*Sicut erat in principio*" (*John* i. 2); I would know in a practical way that God surrounds me on all sides, and that nothing of all that rests on Him is lost. Recalling all that

I have cost You, O my Saviour, I shall realize what divine outlay I represent, and it seems to me that in a boundless humility I shall rediscover a loftiness of spirit that knows no weakness. I shall be proud of You, and of Your work, and I shall do all "in memory of You."

Grant that I may remember well, so that I may also know what it is well to forget; my selfish interests, my stingy and cunning calculations, my false wisdom, and my immense stupidity. Grant me to people my memory with divine images, to keep there, as so many seeds of gratitude, the heavenly relics, the mysterious pledges of Your grace,—the remembrance of all that has descended "*a Patre luminum.*" (*James* i. 17.) Make me understand that behind me there is still You; and that all the keys are in Your hands.

XIII

Rumor multitudinis

The confused noise of a tumult
(*cf. Ezechiel i.* 24.)

I HAVE sought to discover my true name, that which I deserve, that which defines me in Your eyes; and I have found it, Lord. I have found it in the answer of that unhappy man, from whom You drove the demons who held him captive from within. My name? I am also called legion, *quia multi sumus*, (*Mark* v. 9) because I am not alone, I am not one; I am many, I am a confused and restless multitude, a strange anarchy of contradictory tendencies, a senseless mob of persons who push each other about, drive each other out, and all aim at seizing hold of me.

I know it—and it is this perhaps that hinders me from penetrating to my own depths, and from making a serious examination of the subsoil of my being. I foresee that I shall not find anything simple there, nor calm nor clear and I shrink back from these disappointing investigations and these sorrowful examinations. I do not dare to search out the corners of my Jerusalem by the light of torches, for I know it is peopled by fantastic and ambiguous beings, whom I do not care to meet.

Legion; we are many; *multi sumus*. There is in the depths of my soul a machiavellian and crafty personality, coldly selfish, and quick to sacrifice

everything to its personal well-being; a cunning and ungenerous being, the enemy of serene candour, and of uncalculating directness. It loves to evade, to cheat and to pretend; I know it; it is a being full of untruth, and I cannot say that it is a stranger to me. For it speaks at times by my lips, and each time that my speech has failed in sincerity, it has been uttered by this personality. My features are hidden under its mask *Omnis homo mendax.* (*Psalm* cxv. ii.) Candour is not natural to me.

There is also in the depths of my soul a violent and irritable personage, who becomes exasperated in the face of obstacles, and cannot bear the slightest opposition, and who, beneath the exterior which courtesy imposes, boils inwardly at times with bad temper and anger; and who like an unjust and violent aggressor, throws himself upon his neighbour the moment the latter thwarts or contradicts him.

I cannot pretend, Lord, that this violent being is quite a stranger to me. Those rough gestures are too like my own, and I recognize the accent of my own voice in those harsh cries of smothered anger. Those acts of violence are my weaknesses, and they have injured me too much not to be in reality my own. The confused and troubled spirit of Your two Boanerges is restless and growls within me.

There is again in the depths of my soul a being made up of laziness and enervating apathy, a being steeped in drowsiness and idleness, who always finds reasons for putting off till later the accomplishment of irksome drudgery, and finds means to throw all

disagreeable duties upon others; a being that desires nothing more than to let itself live and be carried by others; that saunters along the surface of all duties, filled with scepticism and contempuous of all effort. I know that personage, Lord, so like me that it can be none other than myself. I recognize the lagging gait, the adroitness of the strategical moves in the face of orders that are hard, and that way of escaping from all that wounds. I have so often listened to those complaints and those desires, and to give glory to God who has redeemed me, I acknowledge that I am soft, indolent and sensual.

There is in the depths of my soul a being of grace and of good desires, which loves to join its hands, to repent, to call to You, My God, and to hear You. There is one in my deepest self, who has sought You at all times, who has known no rest without You, and who would gladly have sacrificed to You the hundred fold of all that has been already offered—*quasi nihil despiciet eam.* (*Canticle* viii. 7.) I have never dared say that that being was I myself and myself alone, for so many other sides of myself seemed to give it the lie, so many others, commonplace and bad, supplant this better self, consign it to the shade, and force it back until it becomes dim and almost illusory. And yet, my God, You know that my deepmost desire has always reached out after You, and if my faults have not been as few as they should, my sorrow, at least, has ever striven to be sincere, as sincere as my dull and groping conscience and the dim light that burns within me have made possible. I have

never wholly given up the hope of belonging to You, and in the deep recesses of my soul, I have always felt and always acknowledged that You were necessary to me, above all else.

Who am I then, Lord? And by what name should I be baptized? Shall I remain for ever in confusion and chaos? Can not Your Spirit which "laid the measures of the earth . . . and the order of the heavens" bring forth harmony and grace out of my anarchy and disunion? Can not Your wisdom, which has regulated the rhythm of the stars, direct the movements of my heart, and establish a pacific equilibrium in the centre of my incoherence.

I hear Your answer. It has been given long ago, but the road is long indeed, by which truth travels to the ears of men, and it is only to-day that I begin to fathom Your eternal message. *Vocavi te nomine tuo, Meus es tu.* (*Isaias* xliii. 1.) I have called you by your name, you are Mine. *Mine.* No longer to belong to myself is then the only way to possess myself. To go out entirely from myself and pass into You, is the only way never to be separated from myself, to escape from the inner disunion which is killing me, and to acquire a meaning and a value. I am Yours, and together we shall make me overcome myself. All freedom, of which I might dispose, I surrender to You, so that with its help You may gradually penetrate all that dim, untamed, deep zone of my being where I am not yet my own, and where all my tyrants are restless.

In truth, I owe You all that I am, My Redeemer, and if later on in Your Paradise, my happiness is

to consist in no longer possessing myself except in You, no longer knowing myself or loving myself except in seeing and loving You, should not this future glory begin even here below by Your grace, and should not my whole moral being be mine only through You.

Exorcise all my evil spirits, You alone can speak to them with power, and force them to take flight or to be silent. Give me back, or rather, give me the peaceful serenity of those who having put their sole hope in Your goodness, which has never deceived any one, feel themselves for ever sheltered from all mishap. Grant that I may be really Yours, for if I am Yours, You will be mine, and in that lies the whole of life eternal.

XIV

Ut enarrent mirabilia Tua
That they may recount Your marvels
(*Psalm xxv. 7.*)

IT is sometimes said that holy souls are mirrors that reflect the perfection of Jesus Christ. This comparison is not quite accurate; if it is pressed a little its inadequateness becomes at once apparent. The soul of a saint is at the same time much less and infinitely more than a mirror; it is well to grasp this thoroughly so that we may not err as to the true direction to which our efforts should tend, nor as to the rules which should guide our moral appreciations.

The soul of a saint is far less than a mirror of Christ. For no creature can reproduce in itself the traits of infinite perfection. And yet a holy soul is infinitely more than a mirror; for a mirror explains nothing, develops nothing, and adds nothing; it restricts itself to a sterile reproduction of the image of the reality put before it, and which is no better known for being thus reflected.

But the soul of a saint should expand, develop and explain the perfection of Christ. How can it expand that which is perfect, and develop Him who is the consummation of all creation? How can it set forth in detail all the riches of the Incarnate Word?

The soul should be the mirror of Jesus Christ

as flowers or, better still, as colours are the mirror of the sun.

Flowers do not directly reflect the sun; nevertheless there is not a single one of their hues which does not come from its sole light; from the sumptuous purple of the great flowering poppies to the ivory satin of the lilies in June, every corolla speaks of the sun, and the most humble flower of the field can teach us something of the star which has allowed one of its rays to fall on it.

It is the light of the sun that takes on all the colours of the rainbow in the hollow shells of mother of pearl, and it is this light that shines in the radiance of innocent eyes; it is it again which clothes the dripping autumn forests in sombre garb, and which glistens daintily on the little metallic corselets of insects. If therefore we wish to know what this simple white light holds within itself, if we wish to compose the history of the sun, it will not be enough to reproduce and multiply indefinitely its barren image in the mirror; we must rather question all that shines and all that is coloured here below; we must glean on every side the scattered hues of the ideal palette, we must display all the tints which the purity of its white light conceals within itself, unrevealed to our eyes.

Jesus Christ is King in the world of souls, as the sun is king in the world of light; holy souls are the supernatural prisms through which His divine perfection passes that it may be broken up before our eyes into its infinite hues. Each of these souls should display one colour, in each should gleam forth one special tint, in isolation from the rest,

and thus should they relate, unfold and develop the inner riches of the Son of Man.

For that which He could not realize in the limits of His mortal body, He realizes and will realize, till the end of time, in the fullness of His mystical Body; that which His human lips were not able to say, the grace of His Spirit will cause His Apostles to utter; the balm and wine which His hands have not been able to pour into wounds, will be poured in by the hands of His followers, good Samaritans as He was and through Him, who will pour them forth in His name to cure the unfortunate.

Coming as He did among us, desiring to be clothed in the reality of our human substance, He was forced to be but one individual in the crowd. He made Himself man, *one* man, and He accepted all the limitations that this Incarnation imposed upon Him. He was man and not woman; He died young and never knew old age; He was neither a soldier, nor sailor, nor public official, nor mason, nor field labourer; He had a certain height, a certain countenance, such and such a particular accent, the accent of the Galilean mountain-dwellers; He had His own manner of walking, by which He was recognized afar off; He had favourite expressions and words and thoughts which recurred frequently in His discourses . . . He was one among us, and He was called Jesus, as others were called Andrew or Pilate.

He was man not woman. He has never therefore, in His mortal body, known the passionate love of a mother for her children. And yet when we admire the self-devotion of Christian mothers

bending over their cradles, it is something of Christ Himself that we find there, it is the work of His Spirit, the outcome of His grace. That which He could not realize in the limits of His material and sensitive body, that He realizes in His mystical Body—and holy souls explain, develop and show forth the inexhaustible richness of His perfection. Each one has his own peculiar shade —but all shades come from Him.

He never bore arms as a soldier, and when two swords were shown to Him, He made it clear that He did not wish to use them. In the moment of danger He bade them replace the sword in its sheath. And yet, when the Christian soldier slays in a holy cause, when he watches, when, in the fierce hurricane of the battle, he fights fearlessly and holds his own unyieldingly, it is something of Christ that we discover and admire in him. For that which the Lord of all flesh could not realize in the limits of His material and sensitive body, that He realizes in His mystical Body; it is His power which strengthens the arms of His crusaders, it is through them that He shows us His inexhaustible wealth.

He has never been old; "His own who received Him not" "immolated Him as a lamb" before the number of His days had been completed. And yet when Christian old age bends its brow towards the tomb, there is something of Christ that we all find and venerate in it. Old age shows forth one aspect of His fullness and tells of one part of His mystery. That which the Lord could not realize in the limits of His sensitive and material body,

that He realizes in His mystical Body, in the crowd of those who belong to Him, and through whom He wills never to cease to act and to reveal Himself.

Ut enarrent mirabilia Tua. All our obligations are resumed in this one precept: imitate Christ in whom is found the fullness of all divine perfection. But what is it to imitate Christ? Does it merely mean to do again that which He has done, to reproduce His actions materially, and place our footprints within the marks of His? Are we merely to reflect the face of the Son of Man, as the mirror reflects an object?—No, far rather is it that we should do what He would have done if He had found Himself as we are, where we are; the meaning is that we should keep ourselves so close to Him, be so docile to His Spirit, that He, through us and in us, may complete His work, and His light may shine over our whole life. *Sic est omnis qui natus est ex spiritu.* (*John* iii. 8.)

XV

Cognoscunt Me meæ
My sheep know Me
(*John* x. 14.)

WE know Him in the measure in which we belong to Him; and thus it is that life eternal, which consists in knowing Him, consists just as much in being possessed by Him: *consortium Jesu Christi.* (*St. Thomas.*) Those who choose to be wholly strangers to Him, condemn themselves to be incoherent when they speak of Him; and that folly which drives them far from the Truth, makes them mistake the Truth for Beelzebub. They call this a rational opinion, an appreciation in harmony with their idea.

To know Our Lord as He is, and so to recognize Him wherever He is found, is the seed and fruit of faith. To know by conviction, by divine conviction that He is in the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, and that is it there alone that He is to be found; that is to know Him here below as fully as our pilgrim state allows, and to prepare in the hidden paths of faith, the visions of glory. *Merces erit videre quod credimus.* (*St. Augustine on Psalm cix.*)

To know Him thus, we must belong to Him; and no one belongs to Him who has not been chosen and desired—*electus*—(*Luke* xxiii. 35), no one belongs to Him who has not answered to

this choice, and to this all-powerful love by filial abandonment and reverent submission. Faith is a gift of God, but no one is debarred from its possession beforehand and absolutely: all are called to know divine love through the Word made Flesh.

Faith is a gift which has been accepted; one which we all have the power to shatter by a single blow within our souls as one breaks an earthen vessel—*tanquam vas figuli*—(*Psalm* ii. 9), or to annihilate by slow degrees, as a plant which perishes in a forgotten corner, as a threshold that is worn by footsteps, as gratitude that is lost in forgetfulness. One willed, brutal act is enough to shatter this gift of God; a long continued carelessness, partly contemptuous and partly lazy, may cause us to lose it gradually, almost without being aware of it. God must protect Himself in us against ourselves, both from sudden calamities and from stealthy invasions. That is the whole work of His restoring grace, which hinders or neutralizes our folly.

Have I ever really understood that this divine faith, so readily condemned by the pride of false wisdom, is in all its elements, a heavenly gift coming down from the Father of light, an immediate action of God upon us? Perhaps I imagine vaguely that faith is a kind of natural conviction, more or less solidly established in the mind, and on which an honest and self-sacrificing moral life can be built up. I am tempted to consider the whole matter with but a half attention and practically to forget the role and nature of faith, just as we willingly forego the examination of the foundations of our houses and the excavation of the basements

down to the lowest layer of stones. Who among us thinks seriously of glorying in his faith, not before men, and because of the practical consequences that the profession of this faith entails, and which are often placarded forth; but just simply because this conviction that Christ is God, that His Church is true, is the work of the Holy Spirit and the seal of an eternal love? Who dreams seriously of thanking God, not only for all the providential circumstances which brought him to Baptism, and to the "profession" of the Christian Faith, but just simply for the very gift of faith itself? Who thanks God for having the certitude that saves, and for knowing "that it is thus that the apostles taught."

And yet, this wholly interior faith, this purely theoretical faith, apart from all the consequences which it introduces into our moral life; this simple supernatural adhesion to the Truth of Christ, is impossible except through Him; through Him who gives sight to the blind, and whose secret no one knows unless He has Himself confided it. It is His own sheep who recognize their true Shepherd by the sound of His voice; it is the faithful servants, those who in the night have kept lights burning in their doorways . . . it is to watchful and faithful hearts that it is given to hear afar off . . . coming down the paths of solitude, the stealthy, yet firm step of the Divine Master who approaches. If we do not will to believe, we shall not believe; but it is vain for us to try simply to will it; without the grace of Christ we can never pass any judgment of truth and justice upon Him; we cannot know

Him. For God alone knows Himself in His own mystery, and angels and men only know something of Him just in that measure in which they become one with God. No created power can take hold of God. To become one with God, it is necessary that God should win us and associate us with Himself; there must be a wholly gratuitous initiative, an infinite condescension coming down from above towards us, and this beginning of salvation is the grace of faith.

Thus it is that I have no longer the right to use my intellect as though it were mine alone. It is consecrated by faith even as the lamp of the sanctuary; and "to think as we should" of the things of God is an act of homage and of worship. *Recta sapere.* (*Collect, Pentecost*). Wholly steeped as we are in natural and earthly notions, we often imagine that *the offering of worth* is that of our exterior actions, that which goes under the name of our behaviour. We think that our minds and our convictions belong wholly to the order of nature, and it would seem strange to us, not only that God should claim them, but above all, that He should direct them. We should accustom ourselves no longer to look on our intellect as a purely lay and secular faculty, but rather as the field of the parable, sown throughout with divine corn. There are attitudes of mind which are not catholic, there is a scorn or a weakness, a fear or a presumptuousness which are full of sin. To fear truth is to distrust God present in our mind; to enslave truth to our caprices and prejudices is to lead Christ captive in chains—*vinctum*—(*Matt.* xxvii. 2), to the mockery

of the sordid cohorts. The Christian is at the same time very proud and very humble in his faith, as in his works, because he knows he is but an instrument and that nothing in him is derived from himself alone.

Since our whole life consists in searching for Christ, and our whole eternity consists in keeping Him, faith which, uniting us to Him, allows us to know Him and to recognize Him,—this faith is in reality the cause of all our good and the first of our virtues. *Fundamentum totius spiritualis ædificii.* (*Summa. De Fide*). It suppresses nothing in us; it extinguishes none of our lights; it does not bind us down to childishness, it does not ask us to blindfold our eyes; but, supernaturally sharpening our faculties, making us see with God, and as God, it lays bare before us the Invisible.

XVI

Propter nos

For our sake (service)

(1 *Corinth. ix.* 10.)

I MUST find God! Is there an obstacle which hinders me from doing so, a barrier that stops me, an abyss between us? If there were any such thing I should have an excuse, and my apparent heedlessness would be the outcome of wisdom. But this obstacle, this unconditional obstacle is nothing but an illusion in the spiritual life. The first good tidings of salvation is just that heaven-sent message which teaches us, not only that an open road stretches between us and God, but that this open road is everywhere, we have but to walk on in all simplicity. Every creature that we meet will be the accomplice of our good desires, that is their only destiny. They cannot be our enemies, they exist *propter nos*.

This is the principle which Saint Ignatius has put, with such wisdom and simplicity—and as a matter of course—at the outset of our supernatural education; on the threshold of every generous impulse. It is the sum total of all lessons, the true and joy-bringing lesson which he calls the Foundation of the Spiritual exercises. This lesson is sometimes taken up in a narrowing and, as it were, niggardly sense. This truth, vast as life itself, and

co-extensive with the universe, is crippled, turned into a convenient little receipt, a mild injunction to thrifty good management, a password of timorous and paralysing restraint. We say, and it is perfectly true, and always a necessary prelude: I must not become the slave of anything. But that is only one aspect of the matter, the negative aspect which prepares the way for true indifference. We should immediately add as a corollary to that remark: Nevertheless I am prepared to use all things. I claim nothing, I refuse nothing, my will makes itself as all-embracing as the Will of God, as pliant as His own immense work, of which no smallest portion can be cast off as useless. To true indifference belongs this energy that is ever serene, and a self-surrender that is stored with wealth. This "*propter nos*" goes its way stamping with the seal of brotherhood all realities here below; from my body and mind to the polypes of the deep seas; to the microbes of contagion, and even to death, calumny, neglect and incapacity.

Since "all the rest" *reliqua omnia*—(*Ex. S. Ignatius*), all that stretches out around us, beyond the visible horizon, all this is a means to get to God, it follows necessarily that the final and absolute obstacle, the being that is wholly stubborn, the thing that is simply evil and to be destroyed, has no existence, none that is to say unless I will that it should be in me, unless my will itself becomes it, and that I maliciously refuse to use creatures, so that I may follow my own likes and extravagances. The obstacle is never really more than partial, temporary, apparent, since at the bottom and

essentially, in spite of all the wounding roughness on the surface, the obstacle is a means.

Everything is a means, even opposition. Our virtues climb up over our faults as ivy climbs a rough wall. Difficulties, inward contradictions, the struggle of every day, these are the conditions of our progress, and through these alone are we taught to ponder while we grow to maturity. Our past is no more an obstacle to our advance than our present misery, for the obstacle as such is non-existent: *portas mortis et seras Salvator noster disrupit.* (*Holy Sat. Matins. Response to 6th Lesson.*)

What joy then to know that on our road to God no tree has been thrown across the path, no bridge destroyed. There is no impassable ford, no treacherous bog, no death-bringing desert to traverse. There are hindrances it is true, but only such as make for training, as the resistance of the steep banks of the river serve to control the flow of the waters; there are deeds of warfare too, at times, but only such as are serviceable to us, like the struggle of two hands which wash, while seeming to oppose and thwart each other. The paralysing thought of an all-powerful obstacle blocking our way to God, must then never be allowed to weigh upon the life of a Christian like a curse or a gnawing anguish. Evil has been conquered and its reign is over, and the first word and the last is the "*Confidite*" (*John* xvi. 33), of the Word made Flesh to all those whom He calls to follow Him.

An obvious conclusion forces itself upon us. The conclusion that we have always refused to draw: There is nothing to be destroyed in the

work of God, all is to be used. Our past faults even are to be used as the curled shavings of wood which the action of the plane accumulates under the carpenter's bench. Destruction itself can only be apparent, temporary and make believe. The true and the eternal is the "*abundantius*"—the more abounding. The ultimate measure is the good measure pressed down and overflowing. That which is being prepared in each one of us is the full-flowering of all that we are, and to this development the devil himself must help.

How far away am I, my God, from Your calm unclouded wisdom! How little do I possess of Your spirit that orders all things sweetly! What secret force within me drives me to vandalism in the name of virtue? Why is my soul filled with childish and pagan irritation in the face of obstacles? What blindness is it that hinders me from seeing that both good days and evil bear a revelation for me—*propter nos?* How is it that I have not yet understood that health and sickness, the foolish and the wise, troublesome people as well as friends are all, not only stepping stones to God, but heralds of the wealth which He, my God, destines for me, which He sends through them, through their hands, whether unseen or well known or even rough? All should help me to discover the treasure of the Kingdom. That impatience which has so long muttered within me; all the defects, which, unknowingly, I inherited at birth; my long years of study so inimical, naturally speaking, to childlike sincerity, so heavy to carry with their subtleties of doubt and scepticism, their absorbing distraction

and their spirit of pitiless criticism; the little I have, the little I am, the little I have done; my business and my handicraft hidden and profitless perhaps; all these things are means, and nothing but means, everything is a vein to be explored, a secret to be guessed, a spring of water to be made to gush forth in the desert . . . *in deserto aquæ*. (*Isaias* xxxv. 6.)

But in reality, my God, I never think of these things, rather, like Your unfaithful people, I "murmur" and complain, and that is all. I spend my time regretting that things are as You have made them or allowed them to be. I have not yet learned that this power of regret must be done away with, or rather, since absolutely nothing is to be destroyed, it should be transformed, its face should be turned to the present and to the future. It should be turned into hope and love, instead of being allowed to remain as a mouldy growth, useless and ever-encroaching, at the very core of life. To change regret into clear-sighted love, to see our faults as so many lessons we have been taught, to make use of all that is, would not that be the true application of the words: *Funda nos in pace* (*Ave Maris stella*), and is not this foundation the only one? God does not begin by a warning, nor yet by a summons, but by a word of quietness and joy. All is ours: *omnia vestra sunt*, (1 *Corinth.* iii. 22), and we shall be what we will to be, since God is working with us. Nothing and nobody can hinder us, for there is nothing that is a stranger to our enterprise, nor is there any obstacle.

XVII

Communicantes

Being but one . . . all together

(*Liturgy—Canon of Mass.*)

THIS word is found in the Canon of the Liturgy at the moment when the Sacred Mystery nears the Consecration. And the thing which this word stands for, unfathomable and yet so consoling, is the cause of all my hopes and the beginning of my eternal life. *Communicantes*—the word conveys a complete meaning! No object is attached to it, it is final. It is indeed more than a word, it is a finished phrase.

I am not alone. I am rescued for ever from this curse of the isolated. Invisible links reach down from all the saints of God even to me, and I have a part, I share in all their riches. I am not an unknown person, a bit of wasted refuse, without support and without protection, but I am united, by my entire supernatural being, to the divine family *istorum et omnium sanctorum.* (*Liturgy—Mass.*)

Hence nothing belongs to me exclusively. I can lay claim to nothing as being wholly mine. That community of goods which is found in religious life is but an imperfect symbol of the unity of souls in the riches of grace, all the friends of God together making one.

Communicantes. I not only share the heritage

of the dead. The friends of God people the world I dwell in; the friends of God and the instruments of God, all those that He has made use of to reach me and to whom without knowing it, I am beholden for my joys.

There is a commandment which obliges us to honour those who have given us life—a participation of their own, which we continue when they are no more. But where are the true fathers of my grace, to what unknown poor, to what suffering beggar shall I go to give thanks? Why is it that I am not a pagan? Who has earned for me the reception of baptism? I know of course that a priest has intervened, and that a father and mother have carried me to the font, but by what unseen influences were all these actions guided? Who is the old woman, or the youthful sufferer to whose unceasing recitation of the Rosary "for the intentions of God," I owe the grace of being a Christian? And in moments of difficulty, in the midst of unknown dangers, who was the invisible angel whose silent resignation, whose humility and courage won for me the grace of safety? Moment by moment I incur an immense and infinite debt to the whole Church. I am something, only because I am one with the one thing: the work of God. The lichen knows nothing of what it owes to the stone over which it spreads itself, and the ivy climbing up the trunks of trees is wholly unconscious that it is borrowing their strength.

The Communion of Saints would give me, if I cared to understand it, a glow of charity so purifying, that I would no longer live for myself but

only to serve others. When I look at them, O my God, look at all those whom You have placed round me and before me on the earth, I see at a glance that they are all my creditors.

Priests, to whom do you owe the grace of your priesthood, where are your spiritual godparents? You know well that this grace has not come to you from yourself . . . In the shelter of the great doorway of the Church in your native town, some poor blind beggar stood selling matches, and praying with a simple heart for all those he could not see, one day this prayer laid hold of you as you passed by and marked you out for God. Apostle, to whom are you indebted for your reaper's hook and sheaves, for your boat and overflowing nets? You know well that the fruitfulness of your efforts is not due to you, and that even the courage to make that effort was grafted by grace on the selfish wild-stock of your nature. But one day a little girl, in the "Sister's school," joined her hands before the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes and prayed to God through His holy Mother to have pity on unhappy sinners. And the heart of God was touched by these hands of a child.

The threads of our supernatural destiny cross and recross as the threads of a web, and the cohesion of our lives and of our virtues rests on this oneness of interests. God does not tell us where our benefactors are to be found, so that we may look with grateful eyes on all those who surround us. *Communicantes.*

But if we may make a guess as to the methods by which our heavenly Father leads men, must we

not believe that in the supernatural order He causes the wise to be carried by the ignorant, and the grown-ups by the children, and the leaders by those who are subject to them, and historical celebrities by despised sufferers? On what has He made the immense edifice of His Church rest, as a pyramid on its point? On a humble woman, Queen of the whole supernatural order, Our Lady, Mediatrix of all Grace. On the day of the Purification, in the Temple of Jerusalem, an old man carried a Child, but it was the Child who was leading the old man. *Senex puerum portabat, puer autem senem regebat.* (*Gradual. Mass of Purification.*) The rich, says Saint Clement, are uplifted spiritually by the poor, as the vine is held up by young elms, so that rich and poor sharing all they have may mutually thank each other, and that each one may owe all to all.

My God, I believe that You sanctify parents by their children, and the learned by the illiterate, and those who labour with their minds by those who labour with their hands . . . I am filled with wonder when I think of all the power given over in Your Church into the hands of the baptized multitudes, and I shall no longer allow my soul to cherish feelings of spite or anger against those who have injured me, for I know not with what unknown blessings they have filled me.

The living helped by the dead; the civilized by savages who pray in their far-off lands to the eternal Master; sinners helped by virgins, the children of Eve by the Immaculate, man helped by God . . . *communicantes et venerantes.* (*Liturgy, Mass.*) I wish to keep alive within my soul all the gratitude of

those who possessing nothing receive each day all that they are in need of. We become accustomed to be served, just as we become accustomed to the daily return of light, and plunged in gloomy routine, thoughtless and morose, we finish by believing that other people are parasites and that we are plundered by our neighbours. The Christian soul is broad, sound, grateful and loyal. It despises no one, not even sinners, it knows that hatred breeds darkness and that in detesting our adversaries we are failing, in reality, to recognize our brethren. *Sæpe fratrem odisti et nescis.* (*St. Aug. in Psalm* liv.)

XVIII

Sancta Dei Genitrix
Holy Mother of God
(*Liturgy, Ant. of Our Lady.*)

THOSE in the Church who have shown coldness or reserve towards Our Blessed Lady have always, rightly, been suspected of some error. Protestants find it hard to accept the "Marial exaggerations" of Catholics, though they acknowledge that they are found far back in history, so far indeed as to be met with almost at the beginnings.

Why is it that we need never be ashamed of tenderness towards Mary? What is the underlying principle of this inspired devotion? Is there really some "feminine weakness" in it? Does devotion to Mary impose and perpetuate childish ways that could not be suitable for a manly and strong soul? For want of clear vision in these questions people hesitate or go astray, and piety, no longer leaning upon truth, becomes quickly a morbid exaltation or a merely conventional performance.

Nothing is decrepit in the work of God; His grace never grows old and the virtues inspired by His grace know no decline. Thus it is that the Christian soul is the home of apparently incompatible qualities, it holds within it the prudent wisdom of experience and the fresh candour of an awakening mind. The Christian soul does not wither, the

seasons succeed each other, and are merged one into another within her, without driving each other out as in the material universe. There is so much power in the heart of a child, all the power of the future; there is so much light in the soul of a wise man, all the light of the long past of experience. Could not these two treasures be kept together in a single life, could not ripe age bless God who always gives joy to youth? Why should this be impossible? The kingdom of heaven is for those who become like little children, and trustful goodness is so near akin to early simplicity. Protected by the grace of God, our souls can ripen without losing anything of value, and on our invisible tree the fruit does not develop to the detriment of the flower which it replaces. Eternity is not a continual flight before pursuing death, but the tranquil possession of all good, and of ourselves; our life of grace here is the beginning of this eternal life. We should then find in this life of justice the properties of glory in their early stages. Decay will not touch them. We grow rich without having to pay for our wealth by growing poorer, as those do who buy and sell and trade, clinging to all that flies from them.

To keep the freshness of childhood, this pure treasure in the deep places of a valiant soul, something within us must still be childlike. Shall we then curtail ourselves artificially and pretend to lisp? No, we need only understand ourselves in the light of truth to see that we still need a Mother.

For man is reborn many times; he is formed and perfected only through successive births, and if

custom only keeps alive the memory of our physical and visible birth, yet thought shows us that it is but the first in a long series. The body lives, but the activity of the mind has not been yet born; the mind awakens, but our moral will still sleeps; the will is born, but the power of habit is not yet acquired . . . and thus we go from birth to birth till our eternal birth to that life which has no end. And in reality, in the order of grace—the only one that really counts, for it alone gives a meaning to the rest—in this order we are still unborn, we are infants not adults, *et nondum apparuit quid erimus*. (1 *Epist. St. John iii.* 2.)

Christian piety has understood this perfectly, and the faithful, by instinct, have had recourse to the Mother of the Word, because they are true and do not pretend, as presumptuous and illiterate scholars, that they have already passed the elementary stage in the life of Grace.

We need not therefore lie to ourselves in order to adopt towards our Lady the Mother of all those who believe, the attitude and gestures of childhood; it is only necessary to know ourselves and to silence within ourselves that evil arrogance of hollow pride.

This whole-hearted devotion to the Mother of Christ keeps the true family spirit alive in the Church. I do not now if I am a scholar, I do not know if I am virtuous, I do not know if I am strong or weak, or if I am worth being looked at. Round the hearth the children are but as one people, and the eyes of their mother have levelled them all in the same love: they are only "the children."

I thank Our Lady for having made all the faithful

understand that, before her, there is neither Greek nor Scythian, neither man nor woman, neither learned nor foolish, but one same people, one same state, one same family, the family of those who must be born to light, and in whom grace moulds beforehand the ultimate traits.

We can never thank her enough for that spirit of calm and purity which she has poured into the Church. Only the wilfully blind can refuse to love her for all the spring-time freshness and the gentle thoughts that she has kept alive within the souls of old Christian warriors.

Our Lady of the dying, and Our Lady of the battle, Our Lady of consolation and Our Lady of good help, the Guardian Virgin whom the disciple of Christ invokes from his first prayer to the hour of his death, how could any one imagine that devotion given to her hides as with some non-transparent screen the Person of the One Mediator?

Splendor Patris
Factor Matris
Jesu, nostra gloria
Da ut fiam
Per Mariam
Tua dignus gratia . . .
Bernard of Morlas.

Thus, O my God, Your monks sang of old, in formulas as clear as they were touching, uniting piety and truth, sweetness and strength, and knowing well that all grace has come to us through You, and that You Yourself were given to us in the arms of Your Mother, they knew that she could not be

unheedful of Your work, and that she took a share in all Your Redemption.

I ask but one favour of You, this evening, that of dwelling in Your Church, not as a scholar nor as a philosopher, not as an athlete nor yet as a hero, but just simply as a child of Mary Your Mother.

XIX

Manibus junctis
With joined hands
(*Directions, Lit. Mass.*)

WHEN the mind refuses to pray, the lips can utter words, and something of us, by that alone, still belongs to God And when disgust or weariness or powerlessness to speak takes hold of us, we can yet pray by our attitude, and offer our action to God.

A fantastic posture, it seems to be to some, with joined hands! Many blush at the idea of it, and shrink from doing as simple-minded pious people do! They have never asked themselves the meaning of this traditional gesture, they do not like it because they have never understood it. They seek far off for complicated methods, but the bread with which God feeds the soul is this bread they scorn, the Biblical bread which the patriarchs baked under the blackened cinders. To pray well, we need do no more than join our hands and bring our soul into harmony with this external attitude. The ascetics of Egypt asked nothing more of the sinner Thaïs, as a means of recovering her baptismal innocence than that she should turn towards the East at sunrise and say: *Tu qui plasmasti me, miserere mei.* (*Fathers of the Desert.*) Thou who createdst me, have mercy on me.

With joined hands, a fantastic attitude! Do the

joined hands of little children mean nothing to us, and the joined hands of First Communicants under their white veils; the joined hands of the toilers of the world, and those of husband and wife, who side by side each day, in the face of the unknown morrows of God's Providence, ask of the Father a courage that will never fail. Are not the joined hands of our dead eloquent, lying there in the peace of the cemetery; those hands which we have ourselves perhaps composed in this last attitude, so that in the dreaded day of judgment the Angel of the Resurrection might recognize in them the dignity of the baptized! This time-honoured gesture is full of marvellous lessons, and it is ours to carry them on and make them known as good tidings of salvation, as a means of attaining peace and holiness.

Yes, what is it we want to say, when in order to pray to God we join our human hands, and add no single word to this action, like the cripple whose very misery speaks of itself for him and needs no commentary to support it?

Joined hands are the hands of prisoners, hands that will no longer resist, and no longer claim to be independent; they are the hands of those who surrender themselves, who yield, who assent, the hands of gentleness and obedience, they are then the hands of prayer.

Lord, when You behold the joined hands of Your disciples raised towards You on all sides, You alone know by what invisible bonds they are really fettered, and what evil spirits wish to keep them prisoners, You alone know that our revolts have

never brought us freedom. You, who suffered from it before we did, alone know how closely we are riveted to our old slavery.

Behold then, my God, my hands of a captive; I shall make no more speeches, nor even think; I am weary and I long to find You in peace. Behold, my joined hands sum up the whole of my prayer, and I wait, like the bearer of a flag of truce who utters not a word.

Can we not then "in the secret of our chamber," for a few moments at nightfall, realize what we do in joining our hands, the hands of man, those hands which work out the designs of God, the hands which He has used in His work of to-day, used to bless, to help, to absolve, to raise up, to fight; our hands, which are bound and paralysed by so many secret faults, by so much pride, and by such ease-loving sloth.

Manibus junctis, I am not made to be independent, and, wishing to serve, I need some law, some duty, some reason higher than my caprice. My God, in joining my hands I wish to tell You that You will be my one Master. A prisoner, yes, I surrender myself. Why should I continue to lie and pretend to treat with You on terms of equality? Why should I not place my joined hands in Your everlasting hands? My life and all that I shall ever gain from it is held between them. Keep me, only thus can I escape from all that tyrannizes over me.

When the Church, in her Latin rite, confers the dignity of priesthood on her deacons; after she has conveyed to them the mighty powers of sacri-

ficing, of absolving, and of blessing, after having initiated them into the Mysteries of the Body and Blood of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, as the ceremony approaches its conclusion, the Bishop, as though seized by one last anxiety, turns to the newly made priests and calls them back to him one by one. They mount the steps of the altar, and there as they kneel before the waiting prelate, he takes their joined hands within his own, and asks them, in the solemn tone which is befitting when eternal words are uttered, whether they will promise perpetual and entire obedience and reverence to their lawful superiors. *Promitto*, answers the priest. Then giving him the kiss of peace in the name of the whole Church the Bishop adds: And I promise thee that the peace of God will ever dwell within thee.

Each day Christ awaits His faithful, as one after one they come to Him. To-day it is your turn to mount the steps. The Bishop of your souls,—*episcopus animarum vestrarum*—(1 *Peter* ii 25), asks you to place your joined hands with childlike trust within His wounded and redeeming hands. Let Him do as He pleases, offer no resistance, and if to be joined these hands must first be emptied, by one final act let fall all that the divine embrace refuses to accept and to bless. This is the ever pressing question which Christ puts to all His own: *Promittis?* Do you promise respect and obedience, without murmur or complaint, without weakness or gloomy sadness, the obedience of those who have surrendered from their hearts and to whom it is a joy to serve? It is impossible that the joined

hands which are empty of all fleeting wealth, should not hold safe for us the invisible treasures of virtue and of peace without deception ... To find God again, it is enough to pray in secret—*manibus junctis*.

XX

Opus manuum Tuarum
The work of Your hands
(*Job.* x. 3.)

THE eye that sees all things does not see itself; the eye that sees all things cannot manage to see the other eye that is its neighbour; and the right eye and the left live sixty years and die together without ever having looked at one another.

The truths most near to us are those we reflect upon least willingly and with the greatest difficulty. We pass over them without seeing them, and we go to seek afar off, in the depths of a desert that which God placed at the very door of our dwelling, and which in the impetuosity of our ways we did not notice on our very threshold.

I know that God created me, and I think that I have seen to the bottom of this everyday truth. Its obviousness has become so familiar to me that meditation on it awakes no thrill within me. I know that I have been created, as I know the name by which I am called, and I hurry on at once to some less widely known considerations, to some more effective conclusions. God has created me, that is a story which is already old, an event which has been classified and dated, and from which every passing day removes me further. Once, in former days, I passed from nothingness to being; that

is all. How could anything that would touch us be drawn from this rudimentary philosophy!

Too rudimentary in very truth! My creation is not an incident which took place once upon a time, it is a permanent fact. *I am being created* in the real meaning of the word, that is to say my being, as such, as God for its cause. Being cannot be made over to a subject, so that the latter shall keep it as one might an alms; for apart from its *being* the subject is nothing and creation is the perpetual law of existence, not merely the first getting under way. I need the creating hands not merely to begin to be, but just simply to be, and time alters nothing in this. The habit of being can never become stable in me. After the lapse of centuries my essence remains as incapable of existing by itself as it was on the eve of that day on which, through God, I began to be no longer *nothing*.

We imagine at times that existence has been given to us once for all as a gift, which therefore only calls for gratitude on our part towards a benefactor. One day, we think God made us a present of our being, and like a beggar loaded with treasure and thus made rich, we are the owners of the gifts of another. But creation is in reality an eternal dependence, and an always actual dependence. My being depends upon God as the echo depends on the voice and as the reflection depends on the light. Therefore the final law of my nature is pliant and absolute obedience towards the principle of my being. *Opus manuum Tuarum:* I am always between His fingers.

As in the hands of the potter who moulds the clay

to his fancy, and as in the hands of the weaver who guides the thread according to his plans, and as in the hands of the gardener who shapes and cuts the impassive branches, and puts his own mind and ideas into the trees which he possesses.

There is in the innermost depths of my soul one particular point which I can always reach and which is in harmony with the whole divine work. My being is a being that has been received, and it knows this since it is a conscious being capable of self-knowledge. Thus docility is the very woof of all the virtues, and it is the breath of my supernatural life; there is in fact but one ill, which is to refuse to be dependent. For a creature to refuse to depend means that it throws itself into death with all the power at its command, just as an echo would annihilate itself at the very moment when, refusing to repeat the word that was shouted, it would give up being an echo and would itself cease to be.

Unhappily this simplicity which obeys and submits is not an habitual mode of mine. Over my created nature, like the accumulated debris on a mountain path, whole avalanches have passed, both evil-bearing and oppressive. And I have mingled my imperious desires and my exacting caprices with the sole necessity of serving God. The divine hands have seemed to me to be hard or too covetous, and I have fled before them like a senseless wild beast. I have let myself slip away between His fingers like worthless water. To recover my liberty! As if the condition of my liberty were not the submission of my being to its law; as if I could be really free by ceasing

to be what I am, by introducing anarchy, chaos and discord into my nature?

Opus manuum Tuarum. How would it be if, instead of ruling myself according to my fleeting impressions, I should adopt as rule the first principle of supernatural life? Love the divine hands, those hands which make me, which create me without ceasing, and from which I can never more escape *de manu mea nemo est qui possit eruere.* (*Deut.* xxxii. 39.) And when an unseen Providence entreats me earnestly through events whether tiresome or pleasant, when it turns to the right or to the left, when it carries me in the night or in peril, in *hoc ego sperabo.* (*Psalm* xxvi, 3.) If only I do not leave the creating hands, if only my will dwells there where my nature cannot fail to be; if only I am with the whole strength of my desire that which I am by my whole essence, then my treasure, my security, my only good is in safety.

Our true glorying should have God for its object; for we are the work of God and it is His action in us that is worthy of admiration. The divine hands are rest-bringing, like a strong watchful guardian, and death itself is powerless against that which these hands protect and hold.

Give me, O my God, all that is wanting to me, all that I need: the taste for docility, and the hunger for dependence. This loyal and strong dependence has nothing in it that is trivial or lowering it is the condition of every kind of strength, as is the dependence of the root on the soil, and of the leaf towards the branch. It is at the very moment that the leaf separates itself from the branch that

bears it and gives a meaning to its existence—at the moment that it is whirled away dancing like a creature that has been set free—at the moment when it is nothing more than itself alone, that it is called a dead leaf. I entreat of You, my God, to deliver me from sin which drives me far from You, and from pride which protests within me against the decrees of Your Providence, and the desires of Your grace, from all that insolent obstinacy, that discontent and complaining, those follies which a ray of heavenly light would slay as a nightmare; deliver me from them by making me understand that nothing is more beautiful, nothing more strong, and nothing more holy than to be the work of Your hands.

XXI

Semper et ubique
Always and everywhere
(*Preface of the Mass.*)

ALWAYS and everywhere! Of whom are we speaking? Of God, perhaps, of God eternal and omnipresent. No, the words are spoken of the deep and tranquil gratitude that the faithful soul sends back in unceasing echo to its Lord. *Semper et ubique gratias agere.*

We do not know how much we owe to God, we know still less what continual thanksgiving would add of light to our lives, and of wholeness to our action. We strive laboriously to shut ourselves up within our grievances, we mar the holy joy of the sons of God, and we cry like foolish children, not knowing with what treasures our hands have been filled.

And yet how often we have listened to the chant of the liturgical prefaces with their peremptory assertions! We do not deny that it is meet, just right and salutary to give unceasing thanks, but we do not know the precise reason of this praise and the motives of that gratitude which never slumbers.

The motive is not far removed from the command: *nos tibi* (*Preface, Mass*), we and You; it is only necessary to grasp these two terms and from their relationship prayer will spring forth. How many

souls wander through the world unconscious that God is loading them with favours, and without giving a thought to what He is.

He is the One who forgives and who cures, and I never could keep within my memory all that He has forgiven me. I only know that I need this mercy as the seaweed needs the ocean, and that without it I should have dried up beyond hope of recovery. And those silent pardons granted by God in the evenings of my days, when night casts on all things its pacifying shadow, that munificent and secret pardon hindered my soul from foundering in death, as a traveller whom a cruel shipwreck surprises in the darkness.

Frenum pullorum indocilium (*S. Cl. of Alex*: *Paedagogus*) My God—You Who have checked my untimely ardour, and restrained my restless folly, You who have prevented me from being inconsistent and meaningless, how often have I muttered in anger when some providential obstacle stopped short my presumptuous endeavours. *Gratias agere*, I thank You for having held me in, in spite of myself, as the bridle holds in the untamed foal, and for having made me feel that I had a Master and a law, and that, left to myself, I should destroy myself in anarchy.

Penna volucrum non errantium: (*Paedagogus*) You have co-operated actively in all my good deeds, and You have taken the lead in all my supernatural enterprises, as the sure wings of the bird which accompany it and uphold it as it flies off to the horizon towards unknown skies. When then I look at myself I always find You at the starting

point of all in me that is of worth. It was You who spoke to me one day in that dim Church, when I was praying vaguely near the great entrance, penetrated by the silence and the freshness of the sanctuary; and that word, then spoken, makes it ever more impossible for me to pose as one who knows nothing of Your secrets. I know that You asked of me a service which no other could give, and that my life is the sole answer to Your special call. It was You who looked long on me in the calm of summer skies; and that almost religious serenity which brooded over my hours of study came down from Your hands. It was You who visited me—how gently! in hours of mourning and weariness, hinting that I should allow You to act as a physician, who causes suffering that he may cure our ill more speedily. On each cross that came to me I found Your name and Your command, and Your life-giving grace. And if I was unwilling to accept the whole of Your gift, it is my own fault: I have kept the bitterness without the strength, the poison without the balm, the sorrow without the light. In the depth of every trial, I knew well that there was, for me, a means of growing in goodness and of raising myself above myself.

Semper et ubique! I am always disappointed and disgusted when I look at myself; I prefer to thank You for all that You have accomplished in Your faithful ones. Your work is so beautiful, O my God, let others lament and sigh, I will admire You, and since You are labouring, I will encourage You. I am in admiration at You for having been able to draw such torrents of love from the hearts

of Your disciples; yes, I wonder at You, watching You in the workshop of this Your world, always at Your trade, trying to make out of us (more or less reasonable animals) souls worthy of Yourself. I give You thanks that the whole world is not lost in paganism and ignorance, for we owe that fact to You.

I thank You that all those around me do not despise me and strive to injure me—for without Your grace, we do not know into what abyss our instincts would have driven us.

I give You thanks that at times souls have been compassionate, and have sacrificed themselves to lighten sorrow, for You were at the fountain head of these good impulses, and it was Your love that these acts of mercy expressed.

I give You thanks for having sent us Your Apostles, and for having first fashioned them, before putting them at our service. I give You thanks for the unknown marvels that Your power produces every day, and for the virtue which You keep guard over in the hearts of my unknown brethren. Why should I imagine, so falsely, that I alone count, and why should I not try to enlarge my soul and to become catholic—universal.

I give You thanks for all the Christian past, and for all the future which will be still more glorious; for the young and the children whom You are preparing in the shadow; for the light which, by means of our superiors, reaches down even to our "ignorances"; for all the secrets which Your Providence still holds in reserve, and for all that complex and pathetic story—story of our world being made ready for Your coming.

Semper et ubique faith, hope and charity, is not that enough to give food to my gratitude, and what human power can ever rob me of that? Therefore to my last day, and no matter what may be my moral weakness or my physical suffering, in distress or in triumph, and still more in that "creeping life I live," with its routine ways, without lustre and without heights, which forms the ordinary course of my days, everywhere, I shall strive to chant my preface, and the *Semper et ubique* will save me from all betrayals. We betray You when we cease to give You thanks; we forget who You are, and that is already like an apostasy. Thanksgiving turns our mere existence into a craft or calling, and this present life is the apprenticeship of that craft.

XXII

Vox Domini

The voice of the Master

(*Psalm xxviii. 3, 4, etc.*)

IT is only heard clearly in the desert, not because it is timorous, but because it is deep, and solitude recalls us to ourselves.

In our speechless prayer we listen, and we hear, not *one* voice but a multitude—*quasi vocem turbæ magnæ*—(*Apoc.* xix. 6): as the voice of a great tumult. The first lesson that solitude brings home to us is that we are not alone, far from it. We are being swept along in the immense current of the work of God.

The far-away voices of those who have gone before us which call to us in words of counsel and entreaty, whence do they come? *Vox Domini*, it is Christ who has borrowed the voices of our holy protectors. It is He who speaks in Peter and in all the missionaries of yore. *Rex Christe, virtus fortium*—(*Hymn Vespers, Com. Martyrs*): the King Christ, strength of the brave. It is enough to listen to the distant roar of past ages of Christianity to awake within us a great sense of our dignity. For we are the heirs of all those ages, nay more than the heirs, through us the message of the past is to be carried on. All those voices without faces which murmur in our solitude, have deputed us to guard a sacred deposit . . . *Omnes sancti et sanctæ Dei* . . . (*Litany*

of Saints.) All the saints of God . . . We are members of their company. We are the peers of those who lived for the interests of Christ, and who have no one but the Christians of to-day to carry on this, the one *real business* of the world.

Vox Domini, I hear it in the great crowd that calls: the children who ask for bread, the blind imploring for light, the deaf, who do not even hear the answer to their cry. The many orphans and the great crowd of all God's people, who suffer and are in captivity beneath the rule of the harsh Pharaohs whom they have chosen for their masters . . . All those who stand and wait . . . wait perhaps for me, and in whose lot we cannot allow ourselves to be unconcerned without incurring guilt.

They wait, they ask us to give them all that they need, that is to say that which we ourselves have not got, gentleness and energy, piety and self-sacrifice; peace-bringing light, and purifying love: all that feeds, and all that educates . . . *Vox Domini*, it is Christ in distress, Christ poor who entreats when they speak, and behold the hunger and thirst to be more just and more generous is born within me.

I must love, before I know them, all those whom God's Providence will place in my path: I must recognize them even before they speak, and my eyes must tell them that I am theirs. How is it possible that I should still live for myself and think that lost which I give away. On all the ways of my life, I shall recognize those needy ones for whom the voice of my God has cried out in distress in the night. Grant, O Lord, that I be not empty-

handed before their prayers, nor deaf to their complaints. For it is hard at times to recognize the deserters from Your Cause, in their disguise of hardened sinners!

Vox Domini: In the solitude of my prayer voices call to me from afar, with prophetic warning at times, the voices of those who will do evil to me and succeed in injuring me, those who will be angry with me or hate me, or whose devouring zeal will one day or another bruise and wound me. And in them God asks me to grant, beforehand, a pardon so complete that hereafter the remembrance of their injuries or their blunders will call forth no resentment. I hear You, O my God, and using the words of Your own prayer, I beg of You to forgive them their offences because I have already forgiven them the injuries they have not yet done to me. The voice of Christ is a perpetual call to mercy, but hearts hardened by bitterness remain in their tombs, and His call does not restore them to life. They wish to be deaf, it will be done to them according to their desire.

Vox Domini, the voices of all who have helped me, fed me, trained me, and whose tutelary action still lives within me, as that of the unknown builder immortalized in the cemented masonry of the wall. It seems to me at times so natural, so simple to have been protected from my childhood by the services of unsalaried love. I no more dream of being enraptured at the sight of virtue, than I think of being astonished that the road beneath my feet does not give way. And yet all those who spent themselves in doing good to me were the messengers

and the instruments of redeeming love; from every point of the horizon, love has converged towards my littleness, as the rays of light converge towards a microscopic centre. The voice of all my benefactors from the day of my birth rolls like a vast ocean over my life; and yet I dare to complain, at times, that I am not loved, and that I do not hold that place in the lives of others which my pretentions and my pride have marked out as mine.

What an ennobling responsibility to inherit, from the friends of God, the treasure of the theological virtues, and to be obliged to safeguard and increase it! What humble sweetness in the thought that we are the debtors of an immense though invisible multitude, and that we have but to look around us at the people who consent to put up with us, to discover that we have benefactors on all sides!

Vox Domini, the voice of the Lord above all within me, in the depths of my soul made holy by His grace, where He speaks, now as Master and now as one entreating: humbly as one who petitions, and absolutely as one who commands. I have known it for long and like the child Samuel in the sanctuary of the chosen people, I have learnt to recognize the Voice of the Lord—*Sciebat* (*vocem*) *Domini*. (1 *Kings* iii. 7.) Each time that I have been surprised into hesitation, or have been troubled by some alluring delight, His voice has been heard, faithful and gentle; and through His law, through my leaders, through reason, He has told me what I should do, and what avoid.

And the Voice of the Shepherd calling His sheep at evening, that voice I shall still hear when

all others are silent, and when, in the utter destitution of the final separation, He will come to relieve me of my watch, and to release me from all slaveries. *Nunc Dimittis*. (*Luke* ii. 29.) If I come to love the divine voice I shall not fear that final call, but as a watchman ever on the alert to answer the challenge, I shall pass across the ways of life, undistracted by the deceptive echo of my own voice, undisturbed by short-lived tumults. I shall be as one who listens—*auditor verbi*—(*James* i. 23)—and obeys—*obaudit*.

XXIII

Amen

So be it, it is well

COUNTLESS generations of men have repeated this little word which comes to us from the Patriarchs of old. It was resolutely reiterated by the Israelites at the time of the promises. It was with this little word that Christ opened His most significant discourses. It is the word which is found in the writings of the Apostles: the word which will resound in Heaven, summing up the adoration of the saints.

We have never pondered its meaning, nor learnt to love it. We have not tried to apply it as a lesson to our revolts, nor as a dressing to our wounds. We have not realized that it comes thus from afar, led by God to our prayer, and that it is enough for us to put our whole will into it, to find ourselves sheltered from all the attacks of our enemies and rescued from dissipation of strength, from regret and from death.

When the priest says Mass, he reads prayers in Latin from the Missal, which the faithful in the Church cannot hear, but the little server answers boldly in the name of all, "Amen. Yes, that is all that we desire, all that we ask for. We accept all beforehand, we ratify all. May God hear the prayer which this priest has murmured." Let the pagan-minded smile if they will, nothing, in reality,

is more beautiful than this absolute confidence in the Church our Mother. Christ's disciples are so sure that the priest will ask nothing but what is good for them; it is so natural to them to leave the care of results in the hands of their heavenly Father; they have made their own the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, and have understood that God is more solicitous for their needs than He is for the feeding of His sparrows; they believe so utterly in their Saviour that a simple Amen is enough to express their submissive trust and their foregone acceptance of all that Divine Wisdom has chosen for them.

Our life can be a resolute and all-embracing *Amen*. Perfection is not found in being *rare*, but in being straight, and to be straight we must not cling tenaciously to our own ideas, but rather suit ourselves to all the Will of God, and work only in union with the Master.

Unus est Magister vester. (*Matt.* xxiii. 8.)

An unbroken Amen, which like the weaver's thread turns back ten thousand times upon itself, crossing and recrossing in the loom, always pliant and always firm, becomes in time the marvellous tissue of the seamless garment—*inconsutilis*—(*John* xix. 23). There is not a knot in the whole, no resistance, no stiffness, but also no inconsistent weakness, no unexpected fancies. Nothing can be woven with grains of sand, ropes are not made with water.

How would it be if we should try to enclose our life in an Amen? We have uttered it so often, and it will be the final farewell of the Church militant

placed on our tombstone after the *Requiescat in Pace*. This word which puts the last touch on all creatures as they are committed into the divine hands, might well serve as my distinctive seal. The Amen uttered from the heart, which dispels all grumbling, all exactions, and which fills the soul with luminous peace.

People have been known, at some given moment of their lives, to take, as it were, a large blank sheet of writing paper, and at the bottom of the page, in the guise of a signature they have written the one word, Amen. And after that, they have handed over their lives to God, and His Providence set to work and wrote above this preliminary Amen the long and sorrowful history of a human life. Sorrows were drawn up in line each under its gloomy date, but Amen had accepted them beforehand, and thus robbed them of their poisonous bitterness. And the mighty healing joys of life were there. God wrote each at its hour on the parchment page, like so many resting places on a journey, and far from avoiding them, or forgetting them, far from being caught by them or lulled to sleep among them, the submissive soul, having already uttered the word that delivers, rejoiced in them with God and for Him. Amen, then, beforehand to all the arrangements of God. Amen to the unexpected and sudden checks. Amen to the long-drawn-out troubles, to the unnerving disappointments of each day. Amen to the train that has gone too soon, or arrived too late. Amen to the rain and to the sun, to sleeplessness and to weariness, to tropical heat and to arctic winters. Amen to the sullen peevishness of the

people with whom we work, to their bad habits and their little manias. Amen to the friends and relations whom old age makes selfish and crabbed. A joyous Amen if it is possible, but at least always a loyal and strong Amen. This little word will remove much sinful folly from our paths, it will hold us back from leaping into ditches, and from losing ourselves in the pursuit of our mad dreams.

And when prayer is difficult, when my treasury contains no hitherto unpublished formularies, when all seems dismal, uninspiring, devoid of beauty and tinged with grey, instead of setting out to see afar in the laboured pages of some mystic, for an inflaming theory or extravagant recipe; instead of bewildering ourselves with intoxicating words and vague sentiments, let us take our heads in our hands and try to utter, from the depths of our heart, one simple Amen.

Amen is peremptory like a conclusion, like a treaty that has been signed, a trial that has been ended, a dead man that has been buried. Amen is short as truth, which is but itself, and to which nevertheless there is no end to the telling. Amen is honest, clear and high-spirited, and the powers of darkness within us are afraid of its determined demeanour and of the light which it turns on the darkest corners. Ah! If only we could argue with Amen! Adepts as we are in all the arts of quibbling and contriving, we could easily find some compromise, and our clever casuistry would supply us with convenient solutions. We are past masters in the art of dodging—*rege quod est devium*—(*Seq. Mass, Pentecost*), and we cannot bear to surrender.

But with Amen all resistance melts away and we cease to belong to ourselves. I shall say it then, this modest Amen, which is as humble and as eternal as the Son of God. I shall say it with the unknown and invisible crowd which ever unites itself with my prayer. The expression only of the word may differ, the meaning—never.

From the Amen of triumph to the sobbing cry that ends the *Pie Jesu*, (*Dies Irae*), they all can feed our daily prayer. This little word is enough to make missing virtues spring up in my soul. On the day of my baptism, when the priest pronounced the prescribed words "In the name of the Father . . . " he did not add Amen. May it not have been so arranged that I myself should have the chance of saying it? That my whole life might be, as it were, the complete yet simple answer to the grace which came to meet me before I knew that I existed and which can destroy all deaths within me. Amen.

XXIV

Ego vadam

I go away
(*John vi.* 7.)

WHEN Your disciples were grieving at the thought of losing You, You told them it was good for them that they should no longer see You, and that this departure should be a cause of joy to them.

Why? Should not the lawgiver remain in proximity to his laws to interpret them, and to insure their execution; should not the Master of Truth continue the education of those who have left all to hear Him? When You are no longer seen, Your words and actions will be forgotten and it will be as though You had never existed.

Expedit vobis. (*John* xvi. 7.) And yet divine wisdom is right; and if You went away, it was in order that the Spirit should be sent to us, and that everywhere and always, with the same facility and the same claim, all could become Your disciples.

When You spoke in Galilee, those only could hear who were not too far off from You, and on the outskirts of the crowd they caught but vaguely Your words of eternal life. They jostled each other at the door of the little house in Capernaum where You had taken refuge, and there as everywhere, the stronger drove back the weaker, who were gathered outside, disappointed to be able

to see nothing. They had to tax their ingenuity, when they were ill, in order to get near to touch the fringe of Your cloak, and blind Bartimæus had to shout very loud, as he sat by the road-side, that his need might reach Your ears. You were in Galilee, and they sought You elsewhere; You crossed the lake of Tiberias, and the crowd ran the length of the coast to meet You at the moment of Your landing. Rome did not possess You, nor distant Spain, nor Gaul which had been opened out by the legions of Cæsar, nor beyond over the frontiers of the empire did that immense multitude, which was groping in the night. You were the privilege of a little number, prisoner of an hour and of a place. You the one thing necessary, and the life of all souls.

Expedit vobis. It was good that You should go, and that hiding Your visible and risen body in the clouds of Mount Olivet, You should leave us Your invisible presence and Your voice resounding *in fines orbis terræ.* (*Romans* x. 18.)

The Church which continues You is Catholic and universal, when she speaks all the world can hear, her sacraments are Your actions extended to the uttermost corners of the earth, bringing You quite close to each one of Your own.

For it is indeed You who remit sins, when Your priests absolve the sinners, whom Your grace has disposed to repentance; and to be cured of our infirmities there is no longer any need to take off the roof of the house where You are speaking. The cripples are always at Your feet, and Your eyes never lose sight of any one.

Each one to-day can be Your contemporary; no long distance need be traversed across the ridges of the centuries to find You as an appealing memory. Holiness is found in seeing You where You are, and in blessing Your redeeming hands: *Manus sanctæ vos amplector.* (*Arnulphus, Abbot of Villiers.*) You belong to the whole world, You speak to the whole world, You enlighten the whole world by means of the Spirit whom You have sent and through whom we know the Father and the Son.

Per Te sciamus da Patrem
Noscamus atque Filium.
(*Veni Creator.*)

Is it not in that, O my God, that we have the beginning of all interior life, in knowing that You are present and working, You the eternal Shepherd in the midst of Your sheep-fold? And is not the beginning of Christian charity the knowledge that all, sharing in the same gifts, fashioned by the same grace, adopted by the same Spirit, are not many, but one, but You?

The Church was only really born at that moment when You withdrew Your visible presence, leaving to her the plenitude of power which was needed to carry on Your mission. But no, I speak amiss, and this lawyer-like mode of speech is not the most rich in truth. You have not been replaced on earth by any abstract powers; when leaving us, You did not leave a charter behind; and to speak correctly, it is not a mandate which Your Church fulfils under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, but it is

You who continue to act, it is Your power that is being used, and Your living words that still resound through the voice of the infallible teacher. It is only the limitations of Your mortal body which have ceased to fence in and restrain Your visible action, and the most lowly of Your disciples, the dying, the poor have You with them in their homes, as long ago the Mother-in-law of Simon on the shores of Gennesareth.

Should I not then reverence this ineffable work of the Holy Spirit, as I would have reverenced the visible presence of the Incarnate Word, had I had the happiness of possessing it? Christ waits now, as of yore, for the answers of those who consent to bind themselves to the uttermost; and His eyes travel round the ranks of the crowd—*circumspiciens eos*. (*Mark* iii. 34). All my brethren now are near to Him, as near as the disciples who could hear and touch Him; and out of respect for this work of the unseen Christ in them, I should behold in all of them some sacred thing.

Expedit vobis ut ego vadam. Grant me, O my God, to begin to love Your Spirit and to divine its wonders. Your Spirit, the great bond of Catholic unity—the Paraclete who consoles—consoles, not exactly for Your absence, but for our misery, and who puts His grace in our hearts, which have been saved by Him from being nothingness; *quæ Tu creasti pectora.* (*Veni Creator.*) The Comforter, who brings us into the presence of our Saviour and makes known to us the infinite wealth of His message, and draws out its fullness before us. The Comforter who suppresses the dead past and fills

up the gap of the intervening centuries, that we may begin now, in the Church, the face to face vision of Paradise.

I understand why, in the Litany of the Saints, we implore Christ "through His admirable Ascension"; I understand why the Angels of Galilee warned the Apostles that they should no longer seek in the clouds for Him who was to be met with, poured abroad over the whole earth, for Him who had captivated their hearts and whom they wrongly persisted in seeking here or there—*hic aut illic*—(*Matt.* xxiv. 23), as though He were one of the false and passing messiahs.

Never could we have consoled ourselves for dwelling far off from Him, had He not, in order to remain present with us, chosen to withdraw from us His presence in the flesh, and to send His Spirit to us.

XXV

Os meum annuntiabit
My mouth shall speak of You
(*Liturgy, Matins.*)

I HAVE listened to Your friends and to Your enemies, my God, and I have been surprised to find that on certain points they are in agreement. The former concede to the latter that vocal prayer is an inferior form of prayer, a performance which is somewhat commonplace in its nature, an exercise for beginners which the perfect—those who adore in spirit—have the right and the duty to cut short or leave aside. To move our lips and to repeat words, in order to persuade God, appears to them to be a relic of those dim ages when our ancestors were still pagan. To recite a monotonous series of *Ave Maria* fifty times in succession in a quarter of an hour, is to be as those monks of Asia who murmur vocal prayers like unthinking machines.

Does this prayer of our lips really deserve this haughty condemnation? Is it true that the only prayer worthy of a man and of God is the meditation of a clear mind, which climbs to the battlements of its ivory tower, there to speculate on the infinite? What attractive lesson can be drawn from our vocal prayer, that prayer which the Church imposes on her priests as an imperative and binding obligation?

The lesson is a humble one, but it is true, true with all the actuality of our human state, and since it is true, it brings into our lives order and peace and justice.

I am very weary this evening. My mind succumbs and reels, I cannot speculate on Your greatness, nor plunge into the abstractions of theodicy; I cannot even contemplate the scenes of the Bible story, nor read the beautiful inspired text. But there is one recourse left to me, to me the wearily stumbling pilgrim—I shall take my rosary and I shall say the words, like labourers of the eleventh hour, the pettiness of whose task did not dispense them from the obligation of performing it. I shall say the words and my lips shall move as they did when I prayed for the first time, and as they will doubtless move again, when in my agony I shall speak for the last time. Between these two prayers of our dulled perception, there are others to correspond to every degree of consciousness, to suit every physical condition, every state of soul, since the command to pray always was without exception, we must always be within reach of prayer. Instead of forcing myself into conventional attitudes, I acknowledge that I am drowsy in the evenings of my long days of weary work, but my lips still watch as the sentry at the entrance of the sleeping garrison. And in moments of distraction, of bustling and of panic, on the bridge of a ship, on the top of a tram, at the window of the post office . . . I see that spontaneously, to keep in touch with You, the one Master, I murmur words, consecrated formulas, invocations, which stake out

the paths of my thoughts and hinder me from losing myself in the solitude of illusion.

And You tell me to love vocal prayer, because it is lowly, that is to say suitable to my being, adapted to my weak nature, made for me, who as it were die a little every evening and am rarely wholly awake.

Christum tamen sub ipso
Meditabimur sopore. . . .

Is it not Your poet Prudentius who has already told us this in Your Name?

Prayer of the poor, prayer of the crowds, catholic prayer, in which I do not meet only with my own thoughts and phrases; eternal prayer which clothes my soul as in a uniform, by allowing me to speak as all my ancestors in the faith have spoken.

Ave Maria . . . I shall not invent a single word; I shall repeat this *Ave* as it has been repeated and sung for centuries in my Church, in Your Church, my God; I shall recite it as You inspired my forefathers to recite it, and as, in still more remote times, all Christendom of the Middle Ages recited it; I shall say it, as it was said, with bared head on the eve of great battles, and at the feet of Madonnas, in the cemeteries and by the cradles, at the family table and in the shipwreck . . . all, all recited it as I recite it, and because I carry on this immortal tradition, I feel that I, too, am in the ranks, in the crowd, elbow to elbow with all the living and all the dead gathered round the Mother of the Word.

A soldier in uniform seems noble, for in that

dress, which he has not made himself according to his fancy, but which his country has imposed upon him, he is no longer of such a family or from such a village; he is neither rich nor poor, learned nor ignorant; he is not even strong or weak, fearful or victorious; but in his absolute resemblance to all the defenders of the country, in the perfect regularity of his actions and movements, in the midst of the regiment on the march, he is nothing more than the soldier on duty. His whole people is seen in him. I have seen them pass thus, my God, returning from great battles, the helmet fastened by the chin-strap, the eyes fixed straight before them, as though impassible, all together, while a whole nation acclaimed them. They belong to all, they are for all, and they are greater than themselves because they serve.

And when I pray moving my lips, when I recite the unchangeable Pater, the Psalms, the Gloria in Excelsis, the Magnificat . . . all Your prayers, preserved by Your Church, it seems to me that in the absolute resemblance of the formulas, in the material identity of the expressions, in the midst of the Church militant, I am no longer of such a family, nor of such a city, I am no longer of one century or of another, but, with all my brethren, with the Japanese and the Africans, with children and with the aged, with Saint Augustine and the old bell-ringers, it seems to me that, freed from all decrepit weakness, I become just simply "the Christian" the faithful one on duty.

And all my ostentation fades away, and my ideas and my phrases and my shadow recalling myself

alone, appear then to me to be very narrow, and I begin to breathe freely, because I have escaped from myself and my soul has become catholic.

My God, when You come for me, grant that my piety may be clothed in this uniform, and that vocal prayer may have made me like all Your servants. Those who speak evil of this prayer know nothing of it, and those who blush for it or despise it do not know of what they should be proud *Labia mea aperies*. (*Liturgy, Matins.*)

XXVI

Omnia opera Domini Domino

All you who are His works, bless the Lord

(*Daniel iii.* 5, 7.)

FOR centuries, when praying, Christians have been harassed by distractions, as the Egyptians were tormented by mosquitos—*ciniphes in omnibus finibus eorum.* (*Psalm* civ. 31.) They struggle against these parasites of prayer; they are right to do so, and their action is meritorious, even if the enemy appears to be microscopic. It is very difficult to free ourselves from these lesser slaveries; that indolence of the imagination, which follows every incitement from without, is one form of our servitude, and one symptom of our powerlessness. Perhaps it may even be said, that the more trifling the fault is, the less easy it is to correct. Tigers have been broken in, panthers have been tamed, but no one yet ever tamed a fly nor trained a dragon-fly. Failure discourages or grieves us, and Your disciples, O my God, think that their prayer is worthless because, during these holy hours, they find themselves pondering on other things than You alone.

And yet there must be a road which leads off in a straight line across all creatures to meet the Creator; there must be a way of looking at the most divergent and commonplace things, which will disclose Him who made them; there must be a

way of questioning the work of the Word—*per quem omnia facta sunt*—(*Nicine Creed*), which will make us hear, rising up from all that is, the voice of praise and the word of supernatural truth. Instead of slipping in and out between distractions, and of avoiding, now on the right, and now on the left, all that turns up, and all that chatters, would it not be better to look through all to the depths,with those clear-seeing eyes that pierce the heavens?

When the priest comes back from the altar, still wholly absorbed in the mystery of Communion, our Mother, the Church, bids him murmur the canticle *Benedicite*. And lo, at that hour of recollection, prayer flows over in an inundation of enthusiasm; kneeling at his *prie-Dieu* in a silent sacristy the priest speaks to himself of birds and fishes, of whales and sharks, of glaciers and tempests, of hail and frost, of the story of man and of the aspect of things, gathering together in his formula the whole divine work, with the power of that Spirit of the Word which still lives within him. That is in truth sacerdotal prayer, towards which all Christians should tend, a prayer that is open-armed and all-embracing, springing from one source, and which extends itself as the action of the apostle who baptizes, and of the officiating priest who blesses. There is no reserve and no restriction; only those escape the blessing who voluntarily exile themselves from it. From vault to pavement, from door to apse, the great divine blessing penetrates everything. Why should we make a distinction between the works of God and God Himself, as if between two antagonistic

entities? Cannot our prayer interest itself in snails and weevils, since the words of Christ were concerned with the moth and rust, and oxen falling into wells, and scorpions and brooms, and oil that had to be put into lamps? Why should we persist in looking on those things which God has sanctified as commonplace or despicable or merely boring?—*Tu ne commune dixeris!*—(*Acts* x. 15.) The vision of Joppe has not yet come for us, that vision in which Peter understood, in spite of his Jewish prejudices, that God was no stranger to birds and beasts, and that a pure heart, a heart that was submissive and consequently free, could use things without being subject to them, and could draw from them a harmony of praise.

My God, at times I have had a presentiment that covetousness was only bad because it hindered us from going to the heart of reality; because it misused reality, that is to say, it turned things away from their real functions, and brought night out of light. But if in a prayer of happy rejoicing, or of simple trust, I should call together all Your creatures, if I should relate to You all that they say to me, as we go, at times, to read a message to the person who suggested it, and who smiles on recognizing it; if I should sanctify my very distractions by telling them to You, as I walk with You in that Eden of my life and of Your world, it seems to me that finding You thus everywhere, I should no longer be distracted by anything, and that You would have become my all.

Unhappily things beguile me, and that which is

wrong in my distractions is, not that they terminate in Your work, but that they stop short at the surface of appearances, and do not press in to the heart of that which is. I see all that surrounds me as if I were myself its centre; if I saw all gravitating round the living Principle, round the Redeeming Word, that vision would be a prayer of admiration, and I would not be obliged to stop thinking of birds, or of looking at ants, in order to try to think of You alone, cut off, and, as it were, isolated from Your work. Is not a workman in his place in his workshop? Does the contemplation of a statue distract us from thinking of the sculptor? Teach me to look with clear eyes, and luminous perspicacity, and I shall no longer be forced to despise anything, but shall bring forth praise from all things; and since frogs are mentioned in that Apocalypse which was inspired by Your Spirit, I see no reason why their croaking, in the reeds by the ponds, should not delight my prayer.

My God, would not this be, even here, a little like a foretaste of Paradise? And if I should narrate all my long stories to You, if I should tell You all that fills my mind, and all that troubles me, if my prayer, instead of being by the side of my life or in my life, should become my life itself, conscious of being upheld and directed by You, I think that my old errors and my old terrors would fly away as ghosts, and that the dawn of a peaceful eternity would rise in the soul of Your vagrant disciple.

The final word of all is one of union with the divine work. Each one plays his part in the great game. Each one advances the one business of

life . . . the glorious coming of the Son of Man; and the Earth, Your Holy Earth, the Earth that You loved, that You visited, that You formed in the geological millenaries, this Earth which is our dwelling, because You have placed us there, and which is furthermore our providential educator . . . this Earth . . . I love it, O my God, with a strong, jealous, upraising love, which makes me holy and enlightens me, because it comes from You and because in loving this holy Earth I meet You and I am like to You. *Benedicat terra Dominum* (*terræ*). (*Daniel* iii. 74.)

XXVII

Oculis clausis

With closed eyes

(*cf. Tob. xiv.* 15.)

IF we could bring ourselves to reflect for a few moments on what we are, it would not be long before we ascertained that the most decisive moments of our lives are not the hours in which we have spoken, nor even the hours in which we have worked before men. Our most important hours are, in reality, our most silent hours.

For it is in the silence of the soul that the seemingly most sudden resolutions have been worked out, it is in secret, too, that deterioration goes on, and that ruin is consummated, there, also is slowly tempered that fidelity which trial shows to be unalterable.

We know it well. We know that there is in the depths of every human soul a refuge that no love can unlock, and that no violence can force open. Advice, threats, orders, can indeed rain and strike upon this inner shelter; but never will anyone succeed in gliding cunningly within, nor in taking by storm that last retreat where we belong to no one but ourselves . . . No one can will for us, love in our place or live in our name. Whatever we do, our responsibilities are our own, and in spite of all appearances to the contrary, we live

alone, we die alone, we sin alone, and alone we take the first steps to repentance.

And yet, no, this is not quite true. At the very moment that we penetrate into the desert of our inner self, we perceive that this solitude is peopled by an unseen presence; at the very moment that we shut ourselves up within our inner cenacle, we find ourselves suddenly face to face with One whom no closed door can hinder from being everywhere at home; at the very moment that we believe we are alone, we realize that solitude is an impossibility, and that at the fountain-head of our consciousness, at the starting-point of our determinations, He who made us and re-made us, is busy about us, watches, directs and works with us. We have been invaded, we are an occupied fortress, we cannot escape from that God, whose true name is The Inevitable; and when we shut our eyes in order to see Him no longer, we do not banish Him any more than sleep puts an end to a storm.

The Christian who prays recollects himself, that is to say he re-discovers himself, gathers himself together, frees himself from all useless masters, from all unknown hands, from all fast-holding desires which tear him to pieces and so prevent him from being himself.

Oculis clausis. To recollect ourselves we shut our eyes. Is it in order to see nothing like a timid person or a hypocrite? No, but that we may see all without being dazzled by anything. We fancy that the real sky is that of bright day. No, the true sky is the sky of night, and the brightness conceals it as soon as the sun shines. Let us then

shut our eyes that we may see, in the calm night, the sky of our soul, star-strewn with the lights of grace—*descendens a Patre luminum.* (*James* i. 17.)

The old traditional attitude of joined hands and closed eyes is full of deep meaning, a meaning which escapes the inattentive. With closed eyes! In order to pray do nothing else but this if words are too heavy for your lips and if you can find nothing to say to Him who is the Truth. With eyes fast shut, as those shut their eyes who receive a sudden intimation of unexpected joy, which submerges, in its abundance, even their highest hopes. With eyes tight shut, as of those who hear news of sorrow too deep for tears, and who see in the furthermost corner of their souls for some certainty to which they can cling. With eyes well closed like those of good servants, Your servants, my God, who sleep in the peace of their last sleep, enveloped in Your redeeming pardon . . . All these keep their eyes shut, because they have no use for the glaring light of the sun, and the glitter of things means nothing more to them.

Grant that I may live thus with closed eyes in a recollectedness which will not be due to ignorance or laziness, but to ardent concentration and interior light. For it is just what passes in the secret place of my soul, that is pre-eminently Your work. My silent hours are those in which we talk together looking each other in the face. I have never withdrawn within myself without finding You seated before my door, *sedisti lassus* (*Dies iræ*), and it is indeed within me that Your redemption must be wrought, if I am not to remain for ever a stranger to You.

Everything within me recalls You; everything speaks to me of You as soon as I consent to look upon my life as a conquest of my God, as soon as I seek within myself for the traces of Your love and the relics of Your Incarnation. See, I bear names which belong only to You, and I am a holy thing because of all that You have blessed and consecrated within me.

Why, alas! do foolish day dreams, pre-occupations, anger and regrets come so often to drive me forth from myself? Why is the greater part of my day spent in a kind of strange somnambulism, in which my actions are not really mine, and my speech has nothing in it but words?

I do not live in the deep places. My Cenacle has been profaned. I have brought the nomads into Your house, and the unbelievers have encamped in Sion. You alone can purify the sanctuary, and, driving out the intruders, restore me to myself in peaceful recollection.

Oculis clausis, should we not accustom ourselves to this act, which will be our last, and in our solicitude not to fail at the divine meeting-places should we not watch all the roads of our soul, and guide ourselves by the sole light of the Lamb: *lucerna ejus est agnus*. (*Apoc.* xxi. 23.) Recollectedness would teach me to value faith, and cure me of my ineffectual ravings, I would shut my eyes like all that relinquishes itself and all that entrusts itself, like all that ceases to dread and consents to die.

Hasten in me the moment of peace. It must come at its appointed hour, as the ears of corn which ripen all together on the same day in the

immense expanse of the harvest fields. I shall not cease my restlessness until the hour comes when I shall have understood that nothing is wanting to me of all that I ought to have; the hour, when my desires shall be no more vast than Your Will, and when my treasures shall satisfy all my desires; the day when neither possessing nor seeing anything but You alone, I shall discover, *oculis clausis*, that it is very good to be Your child.

XXVIII

Surgam et ibo ad Patrem
I will arise and will go to the Father
(*Luke xv.* 18.)

I WOULD speak to You, this evening, O my God, of those who do not yet pray, or who pray without knowing that they do so; I want to ask You what You are, and what You do for the sheep—for Your sheep—who are not yet of Your fold. They interest me,—shall I say more than the others? No, for in Your work all is equally worthy of care, but their lot is more uncertain, and when one of these erring souls crosses the threshold of salvation, there is greater joy in heaven than for the perseverance of the ninety-nine just.

Tell me, Lord, what are You for those who seek, and what You do for those who do not find or who are mistaken, and for all those who have voluntarily abandoned the light. I want to be able to look at all things from Your point of view, and to impregnate my ideas with Your judgments, so that I may neither fall into the harsh severity of the pharisee, nor into the soft good-nature of the sceptic . . . I do not know with what feelings I should approach the incredulous or the perverse; I do not know how I should look on them and whether, perhaps, mistrust is not an obligation.

All these men have a supernatural vocation, that is to say that all, since their birth, have had but one

sole destiny, to be united for ever to You. This call is not inactive within them; it is Your word which never returns empty . . . *non revertetur ad me vacuum*—(*Isaias* lv. 11), and therefore all, all these wandering ones, these careless and culpable ones, are being urged by You towards light and peace. It is You who are at work within them, like a workman working underground, who is not seen, and is scarcely heard, but who labours unceasingly in the depths. It is You who hinder their selfishness from congealing into a mass, like a sea that is frozen; it is You Who protect within them the spark beneath the cinders and Who incite the thrust of a new sap within these unfruitful trees. You are the Redeemer of unbelievers, the Father of the poor, the Friend of sinners, and those who have denied this, in their sour and rigid teaching, have been tranquilly excommunicated by Your Church, one after another.

Amator peccatorum (*Arnulf, Abb. of Villers, Brabant*), *Pater pauperum* (*Seq. Pent.*), *Lumen ad revelationem Gentium* (*Luke* ii. 32) . . . If I adopt Your feelings I shall look on these wandering men as a great nation on the march, on the march towards an unknown destiny and towards a goal which is known to You. They shall attain this goal if they continue to advance, and to follow the star of the wise men: *lumen lumine quærunt.* (*Hymn, Epiphany.*) True light will lead them to Justice.

Surgam et ibo . . . I shall reverence, O my God, this first tremor that passes through a penitent soul, this first uneasiness in those who are searching.

For long ages mankind, the human nature that I share, and which is dearer to me than myself, for such long ages, from the depths of its misery has it dreamt of the one hope. To rise up and set out in search of an all-conquering love, which would give a meaning to effort and save suffering from being useless. My God, they have sought after You, Your apostle tells us so in Your name, and we may therefore repeat it, all these prodigals have sought for You, bearing the affliction of their own faults or of the fault of the race, but since they were seeking You, it was because Your grace was working with their effort, and You were less far off from them than they imagined. *Medius vestrum stetit quem vos nescitis.* (*John* i. 26.)

And in these days, too, may I not believe that You have prepared the savages of Africa, and the great peoples of Asia to know You fully some day, by putting them in the way towards horizons less gloomy than the senseless materialistic negation of all hope. May I not believe that in these strange religions something is yet being expressed of the *Surgam et ibo ad Patrem*, and that the movements of these prodigals, like those of cripples or of people awaking from sleep, show at least, in their awkwardness or their ardour, a real desire?

You have organized "economies" of salvation, progressive distributions of the whole truth, which You gave us at last when You came among us; and I do not think that I fail in reverence to the light when I seek for its first rays even in the night. Life has such deep beginnings, and man gains his experience so slowly. Since the fall he has been

groping and calling for You, as a child who has suddenly become blind, and who cries out to some unknown pity.

Give me, my God, pity for souls, and grant that I may never despise sinners; grant that I may be keenly interested in Your great work out there, beyond the visible frontiers of the Church, and let me spare no trouble for the propagation of the Faith in our own countries and far off from our homes. I know people who devote themselves wholly, and quite lawfully, to the expansion of their national interests in foreign lands, and who burn with the desire to make others in some way like themselves; but to bring the orphans to the true Father, the sheep to the Good Shepherd, to co-operate with Christ who suffers and whose grace strives to overcome human weariness, that is a still more enviable lot, and one that prayer puts within our reach.

And then, my God, grant me also to banish from my conduct and from my thoughts all that harmful arrogance with which we so often crush the unbelieving among us, those whom we call our adversaries—the culpable and sinners. They are Your people, I shall speak no ill of them. They will be Your conquest of to-morrow, how then can I cry them down to-day? Wherever a soul is striving it calls for infinite reverence from us; every head turned towards the light bears its invisible aureole. And those who voluntarily do evil and who wickedly hate the light, these I shall not condemn until You have judged them. Since it would be Your triumph to bring all home—*non*

perdidi ex eis quemquam—(*John* xviii. 9), since You were merciful and full of care for Your fugitive and weak Apostles, I wish to work with You to increase Your victory, and I am determined never to hate my brethren, but only to hate the evil which I share in common with them.

Lord, I pass among men, I go round about in our great cities, I read the papers, I hear without listening, and I see without looking . . . We are all one on top of another in our civilized society, and I tell myself that each of these faces of men, each of those words heard, each of those actions seen by chance, can speak to me of You. When they are virtuous, it is because they depend directly on You, and when they are the deeds of a prodigal, they should make me think of the Father.

XXIX

In Ipso radicati
Being rooted in Him
(*Col. ii.* 7.)

LIKE the root which runs towards the centre of the earth, hiding itself that it may be more useful and be able to nourish better, drawn by the mysterious power which is its law, and becoming more strongly attached the longer it advances—thus it is that I should be; winning each day nearer to the deep of God, sinking more into Truth and Justice, attaching myself more and more, through all my actions and all my desires, without weakness and without wavering, to the Eternal which feeds us.

For the soil on which I am, is capable of making me live. The root does not choose its place, but utilizes it. The root is the plant itself underground. The soil in which God's Providence has placed me is full of juices which I know nothing of, or despise, and I refuse to take root in disagreeable occupations, in a sandy or morose environment, in an austere and stony duty; I have not yet learnt the art of fastening on to the roughnesses in the rock, of decorating ruins with flowers, and of causing an all-conquering docility and humble love to spring up everywhere in unfriendly crevices. I am a proud and haughty plant, and I go to pieces from lack of submission.

We lend ourselves temporarily to our work, as a root which drags itself along the surface of the ground and does not intend to fasten there; we dare not take that plunge into the soil, that decisive plunge, which would give strength to all our visible action, and would establish us *in Ipso*. We do not wish to entrust our stability, that is our progress, our future, our happiness, and our being to God alone, and because we reserve ourselves, we waste away.

Our environment, just because it is ours, should be loved by us—genuinely loved. The couch-grass springs up by the side of the roads, and the crocus pierces through an almost frozen earth, and water plantains grow in slimy, muddy ditches, and the fox-glove in the underwood—each plant peoples its own corner of the earth, and makes use of all that it finds there.

There where Providence has placed us is the place in which we should live. We are rooted in an immense and understanding goodness, and the grace of Christ mounts up within us through all the channels of our desires.

My God, I must acknowledge it, though it is utterly ridiculous, for a long time I strove to take root in myself. It is foolish, yet it was years before the absurdity of my effort became evident in my eyes, and even now, very often I find myself beginning it again. I wished to suffice to myself, and I thought that the determination to grow was the only condition necessary for growth; I thought that the firm resolve to feed myself was sufficient to appease my hunger, and to preserve me from

exhaustion from want of food; I thought that I was to myself alone my environment and my soil, and that I had no need of You nor of any one else to become what I wished to be. You appeared to me to be no more than a distant overseer, a gardener perhaps, but not the very earth in which my life was growing. I said to myself that others were only neighbours, models it might be, or rivals, but I did not realize that the soil in which I was planted was impregnated with their example and their virtues, and that growing within Your Church, it is through her that I have received all my powers and all the grace that makes me whole.

In Ipso radicati. Should I not attach myself to You, my God, with an unfaltering love, which would be quite another thing to a mere desire for You; which would be the claim, the call of my famished nature. For it hungers really, that root which goes its way and buries itself, and which must find what is wanting to it, under penalty of dying with all that it holds of promise within it. It seems to me that I have not yet understood that all that surrounds me is a means of uniting myself to You, and that I can grow each day by plunging myself more deeply into Truth.

In order to obtain visible results and to make the plant grow, I foolishly persist in pulling the ends of the leaves and the tips of the branches. I go the shortest way, as we say, when we want to dispense ourselves from thinking; I take hold of the duty, whatever it may be, by the most accessible side, and being very careful as to the exterior and legal correctness of my behaviour, I neglect to work

at the root of my actions, and to fill my soul with total acquiescence.

In fine, I have never seriously undertaken this slow education, through the roots, and if You had not seen to it, there would have been no progress at all. To be just, to be sincere, to be good when no one sees us; to be deeply concerned as to the secret thought that leads us, the triviality of which is often so blame-worthy; to busy oneself, not so much with the plant which is seen and which is but passing, as with the underground plant, the principle and renewer of the other, would not all this mean to begin to grow through the roots and to work in union with the Divine Soil?

Events can carry me from one country to another, throw me out of all my usual occupations, bring me into a stifling or freezing atmosphere, blight my whole exterior life; but the eternal root, *in Ipso*, is unfailing faith and love, the cause of true virtue, and this root, my God, I beg of You to protect, for it is slender and weak: it is at the mercy of the wild boar which roots in the earth—*singularis ferus depastus est eam*—(*Psalm* lxxix. 14): the solitary wild beast preys upon it—it is even endangered by the violent zeal of Your servants who under pretence of tearing up the cockle, uproot Your wheat. How often have I been shaken, bruised and wounded by the actions—very meritorious actions in other respects—of Your friends?

Even their virtues are a danger to my frail being.

Thus it is that to You alone do I entrust the care of sheltering me and making me grow. It is from You alone that I expect the grace of being able to

root myself in the environment Your Providence has assigned to me, and of feeding myself on my duty even if it is rough and unattractive in appearance. For if I dwell in the soil until the end, if neither my faith nor my love allow themselves to be torn up, I shall know that I was planted by the hands of the all-powerful Father. *Omnis plantatio quam non plantavit Pater meus eradicabitur.* (Matt. xv. 13.)

And when I need more energy, more resignation, more gentleness and a more active patience, I shall think all this surplus can be acquired by penetrating deeper within You, and depending more closely upon You. Between plant and soil there is a perpetual interchange. You will welcome my neediness and I shall take Your strength. To be clothed in glory, as Solomon was, it will be enough for me to be like the lilies of Galilee coming forth from their earth-covered bulbs.

XXX

Positis genibus
Kneeling down
(*John xxii.* 41.)

MEN do not easily love Truth for itself, but like savages and children they escape when they see it coming, not knowing if it will allow them to live as they like, and to continue their little affairs. They take shelter in the woods!

But behold, O my God, I am weary of fleeing before this patient, pursuing and inevitable Truth. I know quite well that one day it will overtake me, at the hour when blocked by death, and all retreat cut off, I shall see Truth gaining ground and seizing hold of me to demand a reckoning. I am weary of this childish strategy which rejects discipline and saving constraint, that it may keep its freedom of whim and of caprice. Like all those whom Your grace finally encompasses, behold I fall on my knees wearied out with my unceasing effort to hide or fly from You.

Positis genibus, it is in this attitude that Your faithful people wait for You in the Church, and it is thus also that a Christian prays to You in secret.

When words and phrases and ideas fail him to show clearly that he belongs to You, he offers You spontaneously the homage of bended knees. I have repeated this action thousands of times, without perhaps really understanding it—imitating

others, or from routine, as we uncover our heads when greeting people, or shake hands or apologize. I have not reflected on the salutary lessons that are contained in this humble traditional action, since that evening in Gethsemani when Christ put Himself on His knees for us. If I had really understood it, if even to-day I could penetrate its meaning, I would never again say that prayer had abandoned me, and that the ways were barred between God and me.

Kneeling down, no longer wishing to escape, I allow myself to be taken by Him who has come up with me. Lord, my shoulders are too weighted, how could I dash off into the desert and again escape You; lo, the weight of my falsehood lies heavy upon my weakness. It is so painful to carry the errors which have been laboriously built up. It is so difficult to run when we are encumbered with idols, and when our arms are laden with false gods. It is, above all, so impossible to drag about a heavy heart,—*gravi corde*—(*Psalm* iv. 3), a soul overwhelmed by desires falling back upon it, and it is from myself that, on my knees, I entreat You to deliver me, O King Pacific . . . The beasts of burden in the East, the camels of the desert of which You spoke to Your disciples, kneel down when the moment comes to relieve them of their pack saddles. My weariness sinks under the weight of my errors, kneeling down, I surrender myself. Take pity on me.

Positis genibus. I shall go no further. Here Your grace will come in search of me. I shall not rise up until You have changed my name to

unbeliever, and have restored Your light to me. *Non dimittam te donec benedixeris mihi.* (*Genesis* xxxii. 26.) Each time that I bend my knees, I put You under the necessity of granting my petitions. It is the only way I have of forcing Your hand; there is something which You cannot refuse me when, with all my brethren, I kneel upon the ground. This humble attitude is all-powerful, not because it is base, but because it is true. You have never crushed a man upon his knees; You have never spoken with severity to him; the *flagellum de funiculis* (*John* ii. 15), the biting sting of the scourge of little cords, has only been felt by the substantial tradesmen comfortably seated at their tables, and by the dealers absorbed in their good bargains. The man on his knees is protected by Your mercy and the look which You cast on him is a promise and a resurrection.

Yes, truly, *positis genibus*—he who is on his knees is almost Your Master, and the creature who silently appeals to You in order that he may become more true and less weak, will always triumph. The blessing which I ask of You upon my knees is not that of the sons of Jacob. I deserve no privileges, I do not know if wealth would not enslave me to a crowd of unfaithful longings: the Philistines would invade my soul and their shouts would profane Your sanctuary. I do not ask You to exempt me from the common burdens, to dispense me from the weary drudgery of man, to shorten my working day, to allow me to lounge about when others bleed and die. I do not ask You that I may not grow old, I do not ask You to abolish

winter, to spare me from tempests and from ruin, to keep me from knowing that deep suffering of life poured out among the most trifling occupations, and of days swallowed up by legions of importunate people. I accept everything in this rough business of man, and I shall take my share in the common lot. I do not wish to shed fewer tears, or to receive fewer blows than my comrades in the journey and the fight. I accept to be jostled, I resign myself with all my heart to suffer, but, O my God, I beg of You, on my knees, to deliver me from that evil which is within me, *Libera nos a malo*. (*Matt.* vi. 13.) You would not Yourself have taught us this prayer had You not wished to answer it fully.

I know, indeed, that I must put myself on my knees each day, and therefore that each day, at each hour, You will deliver me from an evil which is ever multiplying. I know well that You will not suppress all my misery at one touch, as a tooth is extracted; I know that this misery is a condition of my virtue and that my supernatural energy increases and rises up on opposition.

Thus without asking You to change me by some instantaneous miracle, I entreat You to protect me from myself, to remember that the ill of my birth is, that I bear in my soul a wounded and foolish will, one which contradicts itself without saying why, and which runs away without saying where, and which changes without saying how. The ill I inherit from birth is that of being disgusted with good, and ever pining for the mediocre, it is of being, as children are, dazzled with all that shines,

and absorbed in ridiculous amusements. My ill is that I am a poor sinner without stability and without worth.

And when You shall see me on my knees, silent, not daring to complete the inventory of my penury, nor to make the addition of my disasters; when, before You, with eyes shut and hands joined there will be nothing but myself, no phrases, no movement, my soul clothed in misery, say, O my God, that You will then deign to remember that You are my Saviour, and that if I were anything in myself, in that very same measure I should cease to have need of You.

XXXI

In finem
Unto the end
(*Opening words of Psalms.*)

THE Eucharist is not an accessory of my life as a Christian. It should be its centre: the centre to which all returns and from which all sets out. Perhaps I have not yet sufficiently explored the truth of His Sacrament.

In former days, at the time when protestant denials thrust themselves like a rough wedge into traditional dogma, Catholics, rightly anxious to protect the truths that were in peril, affirmed vigorously against the Calvinists and Zwinglians, the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. They were right. But by dint of repeating that Christ was present, by dint, above all, of hearing it repeated, people ended by imagining that this presence was the ultimate end of the Sacrament; they thought that Christ was present for the mere sake of being present, and the second chapter of the Eucharistic doctrine faded as a star in the sunlight, in the augmented brightness of the first chapter.

From that time on Communion became more and more a kind of royal visit: Christ granting His presence to the faithful. But as a visit renewed daily would lose its distinction and even its value, so it was judged that Communions should be

distanced from one another, and of rare occurrence, that their brightness might not be tarnished by placing them among ordinary everyday things. And as a princely visit demands laborious preparations the great anxiety became to know, above all, if the faithful were really worthy to receive the Eternal King. Questions of deportment, of etiquette, of cleanliness, of propriety, took the first places. The dwelling should be completely cleaned, adorned and perfumed, before the Divine Majesty could descend into it. And whole categories of Christians, considered too earthly to appear before the Prince of the Ages, were excluded from the benefit of frequent Communion. In a word, as a visit is above all a favour, and gives a good chance of obtaining others, it was said, that in accordance with the formularies of the courts of olden days, these decisive moments should be made use of to present—after the address—the sheet of requests, so that when the visit was over we should keep in our minds a grateful remembrance of it.

But the Eucharist is first of all the Sacrament of the work of Christ. He remains present there that He may work. The sacraments effect invisibly that which they visibly signify. The Eucharist is not a symbol of presence, as a flower might be, or a relic, or a precious pearl or a picture; it is a symbol of food, of spiritual food. *Panis vivus.* (*John* vi. 51.) Food must be received in order to be changed into the one who takes it, but here the food is divine and it changes into its substance the faithful who communicate.

Thus Communion can be frequent without any

difficulty. Can food lose its value as long as it answers a need, and should we render our repasts more rare in order to prevent them from becoming commonplace events? Since the Eucharist is food, the first consideration of the Communicant should be, not to know how he stands as to worthiness, but how he stands as to need. Food is not, first of all, a reward, it is a remedy to that all-pervading death which consumes the organism; it is the reserve force, the rescue party, the ally from outside, that we call upon because without it we perish. The soul in the state of Grace can then communicate. Mortal sin deprives it of this right; for food is not given to the dead.

Finally, since Communion is not a spectacular visit, but the entrance into us of Christ working, the right way to communicate is to receive Christ not in order to present Him with a number of requests, but to offer Him, as it were, a vast timber-yard. He comes with His tools. *Faber et fabri filius.* (*Mark* vi. 3; *Matt.* xiii. 55.) A carpenter and the son of a carpenter. The compliments may be short, but the submissiveness must be absolute, and the prayer of the Communicant is just that supplication of Saint Thomas of Aquin: *Præsta meæ menti de Te vivere.* (*Adoro Te.*)

Christ comes into us to transform us from within. He is the Truth. Instead of losing ourselves in formulas of feelings that are to little purpose, let us love the Truth and accept that it should fashion us to its own likeness. Nothing is more terrible than Truth entering into a life. To receive it without resistance there is need of a lion's courage,

for it dispossesses us at one blow, by one overruling act, and forces us to serve God.

Christ comes into us to transform us completely. He is love. And nothing is more inexorable than a true love, a real love, which we cannot throw off the scent nor put to sleep, and which clings to man as to its prey. *Attraxi te.* (*Jeremias* xxxi. 3.) Allow Love to enter, this ruling, jealous Love, strong as death, and see how He works, the indomitable Workman! See what He will leave standing of our mediocrities and our selfishness, and what He thinks of our flagging laziness.

Christ comes into us to transform us completely. He is "the one who is to come" *qui venturus est.* (*Apoc.* i. 4.) Nothing is more compelling than a future, nothing is more exacting than that "which must fall due." He will come and *omnes sancti cum eo* (*Zach.* xiv. 5), and He asks us to live in expectation, never fixing ourselves in the ephemeral as though it were something final, but desiring "always something beyond."

It would be easier to receive Christ as a guest, and to leave Him no other work than that of signing our requests. Majestic discourses and hyperbolical figures of speech are of infinitely less worth than the simple docility of the dying, who receiving Communion when their minds can no longer control their thoughts very closely, abandon themselves without resistance to the Workman of the last hour. *Domine, quid me vis facere?* (*Acts* ix. 6.) To work with Christ ever more and more fully is always possible, and it is the most desirable fruit which each Communion will ripen.

The Eucharist is food. To train souls for this Sacrament does not then mean that we should prepare little satin-lined oratories in the conscience, but that we should develop in these souls a hunger and thirst after justice, that we should give them a craving for divine things . . . *in invisibilium amorem rapiamur.* (*Preface for Christmas.*) A slow work as are all works of education. Time is not shoved on with the shoulder, and we should not go before the Holy Ghost. But we can ourselves hollow out in our souls that salutary void, which the plenitude of Christ will fill to the brim. *Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit.* (*Adoro Te.*)

XXXII

Obsequium servitutis
The homage of service
(*Liturgy, Mass.*)

THERE is no need to cease to be ourselves in order to begin to be pleasing to God. Man is an animal, endowed with reason. We know that since we learnt our first catechism. Why is it that the most immediate consequences of this simple truth so often appear to us to be very shocking? If we really understood what we are, we would never again say or think ill of the devotions of Christians. They are suitable to our nature. Man is an animal. The thing is true even if the expression of it is somewhat crude in its simplicity. And God has wished to be adored and loved by animals endowed with reason. There is the fact, in face of which our fastidiousness has no right to revolt. Men then, that is animals endowed with reason, will serve God in a way that is conformed to their nature. They will utter cries, in rhythm or not; they will weep; they will stretch forth their arms in silence; they will move about, run to the right or to the left, go backwards and forwards on the ground; they will gesticulate, and it will all be right, since they are acting according to their kind.

In honour of their God they will mix mortar, they will mould clay, they will make houses of

baked earth; these will be the Churches. In olden days they raised a Shepherd's tent for Jehovah in the desert without water: *ambulabam in tabernaculo et tentorio.* (2 *Kings* vii. 6.)

Then they will make a noise, to show that they are in joy or sorrow; they will play music; they will engrave outlines on stone; they will light fire at the ends of sticks of wax; they will make resin give forth smoke from the bottom of a metal pot.

And with these movements, these songs, these rhythms, this smoke and these flames, they will compose the liturgy of men, that is the worship of animals endowed with reason, serving the Master of all things.

Where are those fools or pagans who will find in all this anything to be shocked at, or to laugh at? Have we not the right to be men when we *are* men? and being men have we not the right to act according to the nature of man? Whence then this disdain and scandal when a Christian people sets out on pilgrimage, when they sing or sigh, and when they enclose the Eucharist as a treasure in the Tabernacle?

My God, I love to find in Your Church this great respect for all that is corporal. The body is a holy thing since You have divinized the nature of these rational animals, which we are, and since the Word has taken Flesh and has come to dwell under our tents. How I thank You for not having despised the body which labours and suffers, and which is the instrument of thought and of virtue! Without a brain, there would be no baptized soul, and without a heart, within which Your love brings

a quicker beat, who among animals could fight in Your service? I love the iron-clad arms of Your warriors of old, delivering the Holy Sepulchre at the cost of great suffering to their bruised bodies. I love the hands of Your Apostles, which raised up the wounded and poured water from brimming shells on the heads of the infidels. I love and respect the bodies of Your martyrs. The flames which burnt Saint Lawrence or Saint Polycarp, the wild bull that tore Saint Perpetua, the sword that gashed the neck of Saint Agnes would have all been powerless against pure spirits; but the bodies of Your saints have suffered, and You have been busy about them, just as long ago You went Yourself to bury the body of Your prophet Moses in the Vale of Phogor. *Corpora sanctorum in pace sepulta sunt.* (*Ecclesiasticus* xliv. 14.)

Was it not the mouth of Chrysostom which did homage to You; and was it not the harsh voice of the Precursor which prepared Your way? We admire the living breastwork of our soldiers serving as a rampart to their threatened country; but have You not deified our misery in a marvellous way since You have taken our whole body into Your service?

Alas! Your wisdom is often misjudged, and man reels from one delirium to another, from haughty contempt to coarse covetousness, without being able to bring himself to rest in equilibrium. To love the body means too often for him, unrestrained enjoyment, it means to look upon the body as a last end, and to awaken in it a host of destructive desires. But such love is contempt writ

large. Love is made up of esteem and of modest reserve; it fears to profane that which it touches, as we fear to tarnish the limpidity of a crystal by the marks of our fingers on it.

To love the body is to reverence it for all that it suffers and for all that it prepares for us; for it is the labourer in every job and struggles unceasingly under a stern command. To love it is to recognize that it has been crippled since the first sin of the race, and that, in spite of its wounds, it yet has the mission to reconquer painfully all that it has lost, until it shall be re-clothed in glory and withdrawn from all its enemies—*neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra.* (*Apoc.* xxi. 4.)

The liturgy of men, and their dumb prayer, *obsequium servitutis*, the homage of service! Lord, we have not yet left Egypt and we bear the yoke of slaves. We serve You, but we are still enslaved, and we know not the liberty of pure spirits.

Therefore have pity on our weakness and on our little ways; on our paintings and our pictures, our stained windows and our clumsy buildings! Do not despise the hut where the missioner establishes his altar on two empty boxes; disdain not the hymn with which unskilful voices make the village Church resound after Benediction in the month of May; look with kindness on the battered censer which the little server swings at arm's length; and when your priest at the Altar intones an *Oremus*, think, O Lord, that it is Your people who pray, this people whom death holds fast and ravages, this people riveted to the body and to matter, this people, yes, this race of animals,

ever groping and uncertain, so often deceived by their dim conjectures, so often crushed under the blows of sorrow, and scarcely ever fully awakened from their long-drawn nightmares.

Populus Tuus (*Exodus* xxxiii. 16.): they are Yours. They are a flock. You know it, You Yourself said it. It was to sheep that You spontaneously likened the multitude. They will serve You as they can, being quite sure, that if scornful people, ashamed of being men, judge them to be coarse and materialistic in their adoration, You who made them will never have anything but tenderness for all those bodies which have been redeemed by Your own.

XXIII

Pretiosa Margarita

A rare pearl

(*Matt. xiii.* 46.)

THE holiness which only ripens on the wood of extraordinary occasions cannot be the daily bread of anyone. To seek the food of a people in what is rare, unheard of, unexpected, is to condemn them to die of starvation. And yet a Christian people should be fed on that exquisite and finished virtue which is called holiness. And the Kingdom of heaven is likened to a precious pearl which is found as a treasure.

Inventa margarita (*Matt.* xiii. 46.), treasure, yes, but a treasure already discovered, and which is no longer to be sought for in the night. Sanctity does not lie in the extraordinary which is always a near neighbour to the extravagant and to the grotesque. The Friend of God is not only the leading actor. There are other friends in the roles, substitutes and even supernumeraries, all equally essential, and without whom the hero of the drama would not be able to deliver his speeches. To do very well, it is not in the least necessary to quit the ranks, nor to stand forward out of line. "Do not hide me, I wish to appear," said the Conqueror of Marignano in the heat of the battle. If everyone were extraordinary and if no one would accept to be eclipsed by another, the whole world would be levelled down

to the ordinary and no one would be conspicuous. These truths are very old, but our foolish prejudices persist in turning their backs on them, and our pride has sworn to overlook them. We are immediately captivated, in the lives of Saints, by that which they themselves, or their biographers, show us of the marvellous. Their exploits fascinate us, not because they were just what truth required at the moment, but because they are beyond the ordinary and attract the eye.

Even when we place our holiness in ordinary things, we again wish to do them "extraordinarily" well. "*Communia non communiter*," said Saint John Berchmans. He was right, but there is a way of taking this splendid principle of supernatural motive, which quickly turns it into an error. We fancy we must give the same care to details as to essentials, that we must deposit a uniform layer of attention on little things and on great, and that to distinguish between the relative importance of objects is to cease to look on them in the right way. The soul then drowns itself in trifles. It maintains a uniform pace at all times, believing that peace and moderation consist in never changing anything. The soul becomes rigid and mechanical. Under the plea of doing everything with extraordinary care, it falls into an incurable error: that of accepting as of equal worth things which are not so, and for want of drawing a distinction between things all are confused.

Holiness does not lie in exaggeration, not even in pious exaggeration, but it is found in a very pliant adaptability to all duties. It does not treat

all that presents itself in the same way. It attributes to details all the value of details and no more. It assigns to the essential all the value of an absolute, and nothing less. In its theoretical appreciations sanctity observes all faint gradations, and in the practical carrying out of the theories it observes all modes of the real. Playful or serious, sounding the fords or leaping over the obstacles, examining summarily or studying profoundly, sanctity adapts itself, that is to say it obeys and advances, not according to some personal rule, arbitrarily imposed on things, but by an intelligent and unreserved submission to the law which God Himself has given to them.

To be adaptable is to be detached, it is also to live, for life is only a continual adaptation . . . adaptation to the imperious but repelling duty; to refreshing recreation and to the marvels of art; to war, without, however, dreaming only of battles and being unable to understand anything else; adaptation to peace without being terrified and melting away when on a sudden the hour for combat sounds. To be adaptable is to carry our resources with us, by keeping ourselves always very near to God, who distributes these resources to us each day; to be adaptable is to do our own work without murmuring, but filled with a great, heartfelt and valiant submissiveness.

He who submits to being adaptable, submits to being dependent, and that is what we do not like. We arrange our lives for ourselves beforehand; there is a plan, a hermitage of our own, and we legislate as if we were the masters of our destiny,

and the rulers of events. Our model is not Christ who subjected Himself to all, and who knew obedience by the things He suffered—*didicit, ex eis quæ passus est, obœdientiam* (*Heb.* v. 8.)—but, unconsciously, our model is the one that formerly floated before the imaginations of the Greek Stoics, —Hercules of the mighty deeds and fabulous exploits—Hercules, a baptized Hercules no doubt, who walks through the world with his club in his hand making laws, and harsh towards everything.

My God, if I were adaptable to my duty and to Your will, I should never complain and You would have in me a docile instrument for all Your desires. If I were adaptable I should make use of all things and be a slave to none, I should keep a freshness of soul, a serene keen-sightedness, a living interest in Your work, all that, in fine, which anxiety about my own excellence dries up or destroys without an gain.

If I could but find my sanctity, O my God, there where You Yourself have placed it for me—in living without murmuring in this room, winter and summer, in doing my work, in smiling on those who are troublesome, in keeping my heart free from bitterness, and my soul free from anger, in sacrificing myself to the service of all, and in letting go that anxiety to judge myself and to weigh myself in accurate balances, as if the least of my little discomforts could disturb the equilibrium of the stars!

After all, it is never the work itself which is paltry or prosaic. It comes from You, it is divine, it is itself the rare, the unique pearl, *pretiosa mar-*

garita, which is like to the Kingdom of Heaven. There *is* one thing which nothing and no one can replace, and that is myself, no matter how insignificant people may think me to be; there is one unique deed which no one can perform except myself, and that is the deed which I actually accomplish at this moment, praying to You in secret. To be rare, then, I need not copy any one whomsoever; it is enough that I do not cease to be myself, that I do not destroy myself in wild dreams, but that, wholly adaptable in the hands of Providence, without reserve, and without resistance, I am fully just what You wish that I should be.

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